



THE
EAGLE'S NEST

By
A · L · O · E





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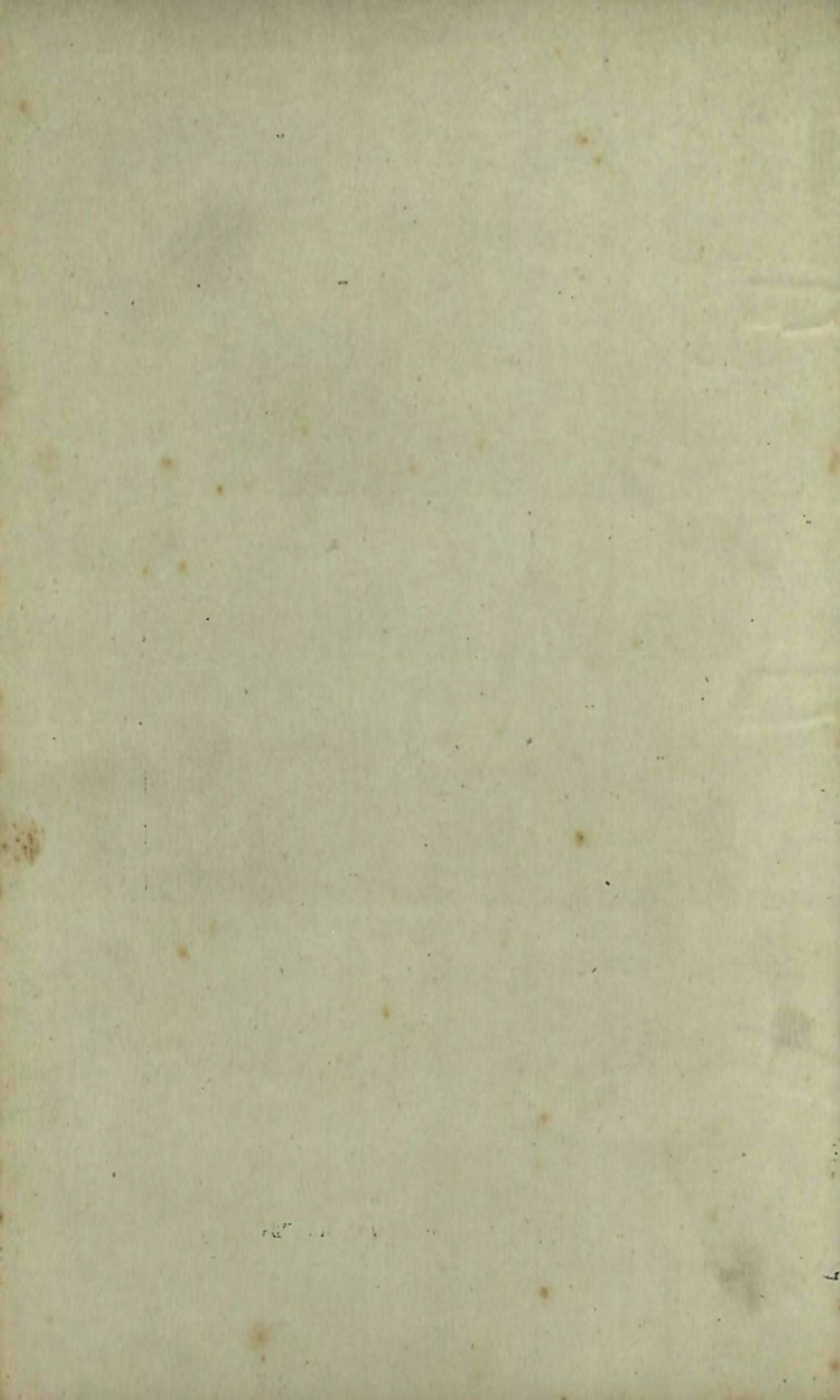
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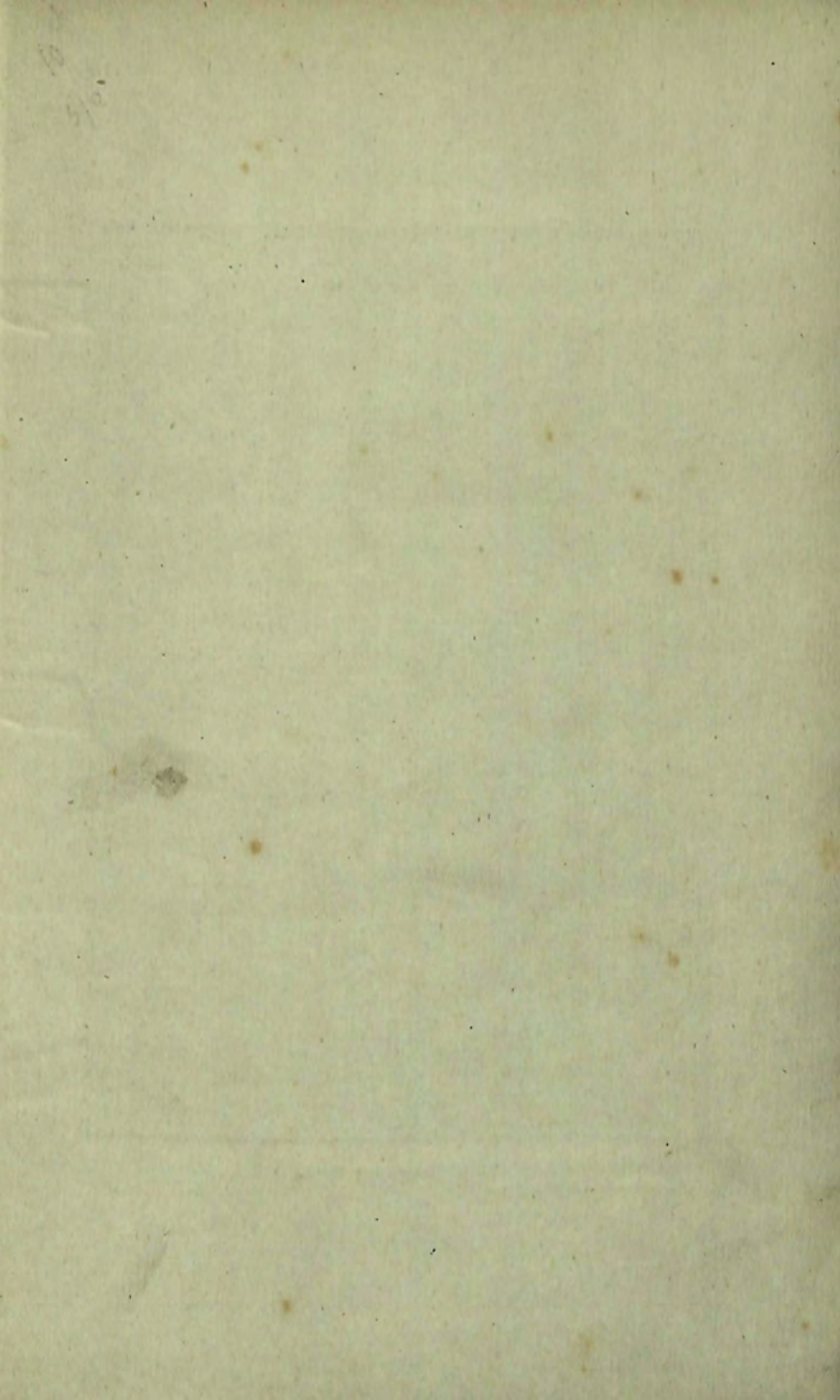
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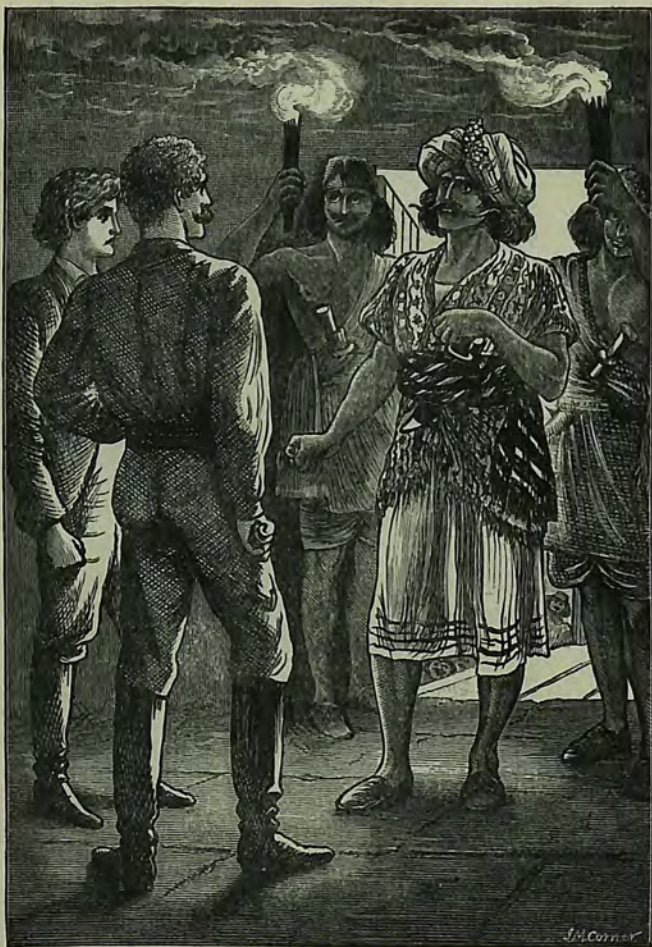
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LIFE IN THE EAGLE'S NEST.





"A very striking figure was Assad Khan, as seen by the light of torches carried by his attendants."—p. 87.

LIFE IN THE
EAGLE'S NEST:

A Tale of Afghanistan.

BY

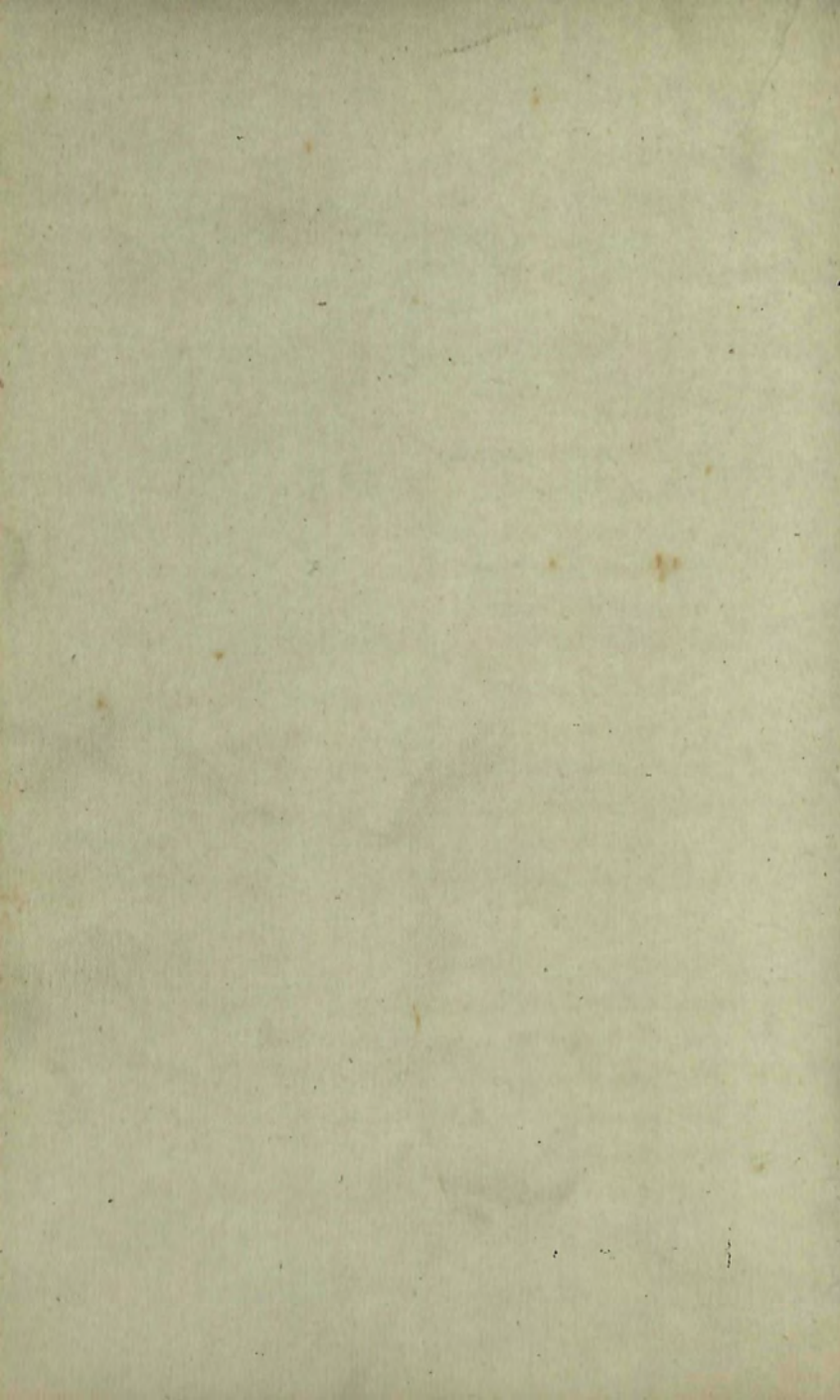
A. L. O. E.,

AUTHORESS OF "THE CLAREMONT TALES," "NED FRANKS," "SHEER OFF,"
"THE WHITE BEAR'S DEN," ETC.



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AND EDINBURGH.



PREFACE.

THE Authoress of the following tale has often said that she has devoted her pen to her adopted country, India. Has she then changed her purpose in again writing a story for British readers? No; though in a different way, she is still seeking to serve the Missionary cause. A.L.O.E. wants money for her "Mission Plough," a School for Mohammedan and heathen boys in Batála, and it occurred to her that hours, *not* taken from her city work, might be given to earning something by literary effort.

The School which A.L.O.E. thus attempts to prop up by her quill, sprang out of a felt want. Native boys were willing to hear the Gospel, and in the Government School were taught no religion at all. The Missionary Society to which A.L.O.E. belongs, restricts its attention to women and girls; of course not a penny could be taken from its funds for boys, though teaching them indirectly helps the Zenana work—the seed of truth being sometimes carried by them to the very strongholds of feminine bigotry.

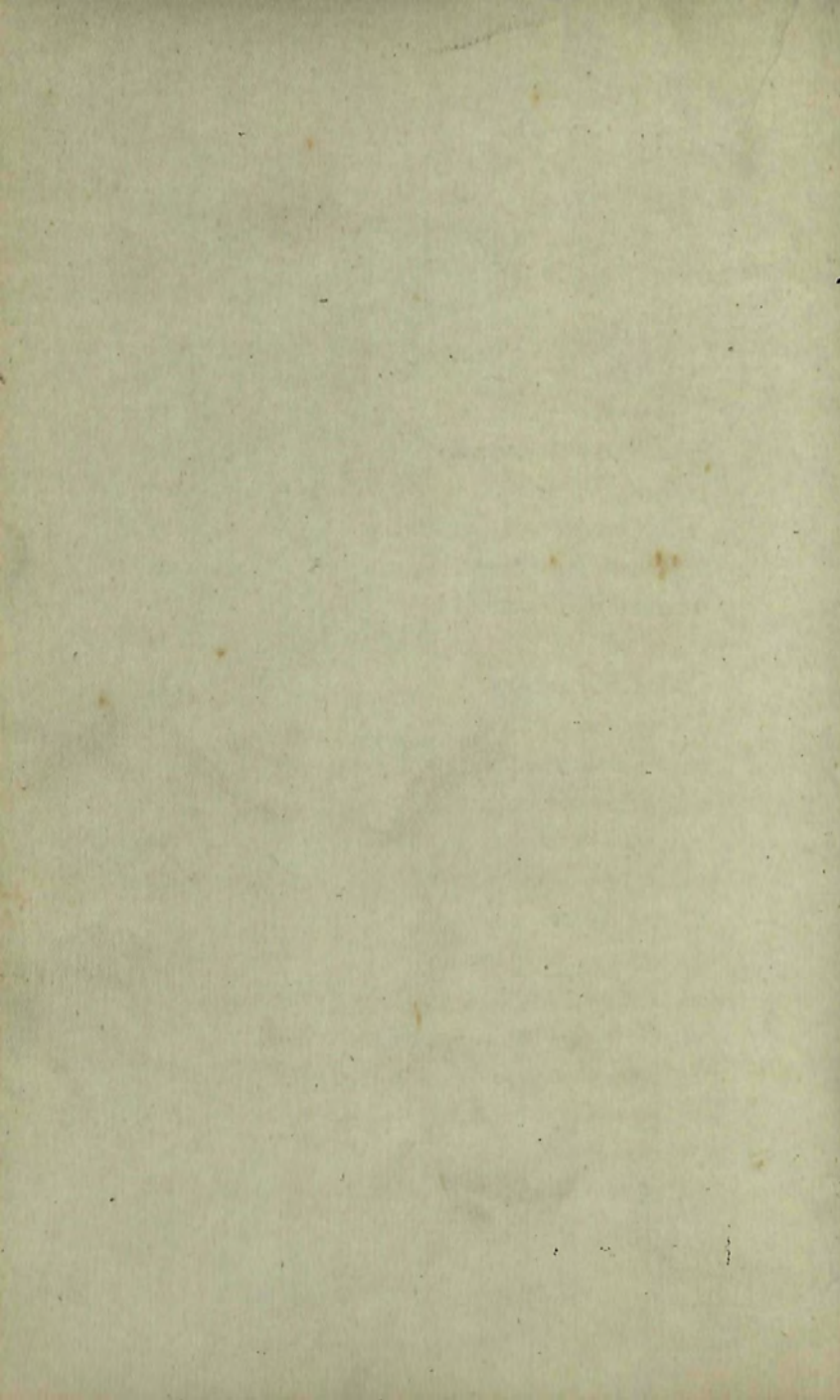
Thus the "Mission Plough" is supported by no society; the expenses are to be met by personal effort, or the assistance of those who sympathise with its object. A.L.O.E. most gratefully acknowledges the great liberality with which kind friends have come to her aid. May the Lord reward them a thousandfold for what they have done!



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LIFE IN THE EAGLE'S NEST.



CHAPTER I.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

“THE post-dák at last!” exclaimed Walter Gurney, springing to his feet, as, encompassed by a cloud of dust, the vehicle for which he had been watching appeared in the distance, the flourish of a horn announcing its approach. The youth had been reclining under the shade of a peepul tree, at the side of the road which led to a frontier station on the border line which divides India from the land of the Afghans. The post had always to be met at this point by Walter, as the horses were never turned down the rude road which led to a missionary’s *bungalow*, situated about two miles off, almost close to a native village. The Rev. William Gurney, till his death, which had occurred about two months ere my

story opens, had always dwelt amongst his poor flock, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." The missionary's sole companion had been Walter, his only son, whom he had himself educated in India, the neighbourhood of mountains preventing the absolute necessity of his sending his motherless boy to England.

This was the third time that Walter had anxiously gone to meet the home mail. By his dying father's desire he had remained at Santgunge till he should receive a letter from his grandmother in London, in answer to the announcement of the missionary's death. Walter could not form any plans for his own future till he should hear from the nearest relative now left to him upon earth.

The expected letter was handed down by the coachman to Walter, and with another blast of the horn the *dák-gári** rattled on its way. Walter returned to the peepul tree, and, leaning against its trunk, examined the envelope of the letter before opening it to read the contents.

"Black-edged, but not written in my grandmother's hand. She must have been ill, which would account for her not writing before. The news which I sent must have grieved her sorely."

Walter broke open the letter and glanced at the

* Post-cart or carriage.

signature at the end; it was that of his uncle, whose handwriting was strange to the youth. Augustus Gurney, the wealthy banker, had never cared to keep up intercourse with a brother who had demeaned himself, as he thought, by becoming a humble missionary. The stiff, formal, business-like writing was characteristic of him who had penned it. The letter was dated from Eaton Square, 1871.

“DEAR WALTER,—The melancholy announcement of your father’s decease never reached your grandmother; it arrived on the day of her funeral. I have delayed writing till all affairs were settled. You asked for directions for your future course, and whether there were any means of your finishing your education in some college in England. You shall receive a frank reply. My mother’s income being only a life annuity, ceased at her death; she had no property to leave. There are no funds available to pay your passage home or start you in life. Every profession here is overcrowded. You must not look to me, as I have three sons to provide for, and I never approved of the course which your father chose to take. You had better try to find some employment in India. Doubtless you have there plenty of friends; here you would be amongst strangers.—Your affectionate uncle,

AUGUSTUS GURNEY.”

"Strangers indeed," muttered Walter between his clenched teeth. "Can this man, I will not call him uncle, actually receive the news of the death of his only brother, a brother whom he always neglected, a brother of whom he should have been proud, without so much as a feeling of remorse, or one word of sympathy to his orphan? He does not wish to be burdened with a poor relation! He shall certainly never be troubled by me!" Walter crushed up the letter in his hands, and with long rapid strides took his way along the rough, weed-overgrown path which led to his desolate home. Bitter were the orphan youth's reflections.

"'Doubtless you have plenty of friends,'" he writes. "Did my uncle know nothing of the isolated life of self-denial led by my father amongst our ignorant peasants? I have seen nothing of the world; know no one to take me by the hand. Though I have a passion for study, I have not received the educational advantages that would fit me for Government employment. I have led a kind of Robinson Crusoe life; I can shoot, can turn a straight furrow, ride, plant trees, and do a little carpenter's work; talk to natives of India or Afghanistan in half-a-dozen jargons; but I know little of mathematics, am only self-taught in Latin;

I could pass no examination,—at least I doubt that I could,—and I have no funds to support me till I could study up for one. I changed my last rupee to-day.”

It may be little to the credit of Walter that indignation towards his uncle and anxiety about his own future were the first thoughts that came into his mind on learning of the death of his aged relative in England. But Walter, brought up in the wilds of Santgunge, had never seen his grandmother nor received any letter from her. Once a-month an epistle from the old lady had regularly reached her missionary son, with a brief message to his boy at the end. Before Walter reached his home, more gentle feelings prevailed. He could feel thankful that parent and son had both been spared the pang of bereavement which had wrung his own heart. Walter thought of the joyful surprise of the meeting above of those who for twenty years had been severed on earth.

“Yes, a time will come when we shall care little whether our path was rough or smooth on earth ; whether it led upwards to distinction, or downwards to poverty and trouble,” said Walter to himself, as he entered the little bungalow in which he had dwelt from his birth. It was a most unadorned dwelling, built chiefly of sun-dried bricks, and by

no means in good repair, for the rains had injured the walls, and white ants eaten into the timber. The interior matched the outside; a few prints and texts, with an old brown map, were the only ornaments; the rough mat on the brick floor had been worn into holes by the tread of many bare feet. A few chairs and a table, a bookcase and its contents, chiefly religious books, reports, and Urdu pamphlets, summed up the furniture of the room which Walter entered. The youth's own appearance was in character with his surroundings. His clothes, originally of common material, were worn almost threadbare. Walter was tall and slight, and the first impression which a stranger would receive was that he was overgrown and underfed. Though his age was barely seventeen, there were signs of care on his countenance, and a sunken look under his eyes that told of months of night watching and daily hardship. Yet a second glance at his form, and the broad expansive brow from which the weary lad now pushed back the wavy auburn hair, might suggest a presage that after a few years the figure might be remarkably fine, the countenance singularly intellectual.

Walter threw himself on a chair. Raising his eyes, their glance rested on a picture with time-stained margin, which had been familiar to him

from his earliest childhood. The youth's almost sole recollection of his mother was her explaining the meaning of the print to her little boy, then young enough to be raised in her arms. The print represented the Israelites encamped at night in the desert, their tents made visible by the light streaming from the pillar of fire before them. That print had been, as it were, the text of the last exhortation which Walter had heard from his father, which vividly now recurred to the mind of the desolate youth.

"God may lead us into the desert, my boy, but it is a blessed way if His presence go with us. The eye of faith still sees the pillar of cloud and fire to guide us wherever God wills we should go, and we are safe—ay, and happy—as long as we follow the path marked out by Him who is all wisdom and love."

"The pillar has for me long rested over this place," said Walter to himself; "I would not have left my father, with his broken health, to struggle on alone. But now the pillar will move on,—I wonder whither! I had hoped to England—and Cambridge—with future honour and usefulness beyond. That letter has dashed down all my air-built castles! The desert around me looks very bare; but O my God!—my father's God! do

Thou guide me, and give me grace and courage to follow on, nor turn aside to the right or the left."

Walter knelt down in his desolate home, and in a short but fervent prayer commended himself to the guardian care of a Saviour God. He arose from his knees cheered and refreshed. Walter then applied himself to the homely care of preparing his evening meal, for, soon after his father's death, he had dismissed his only servant. Some of the native flock would willingly have worked for the missionary's son, without hope of payment beyond that of a kind look and word, but their offers had been declined with grateful thanks by the orphan.

Walter's gun had on this day supplied him with a more sumptuous repast than usually fell to his lot; but he had emptied his powder-flask for the charge which had brought down his pheasant, and had no means of filling it again. The youth, as he plucked off the beautiful feathers of his prize, saw in their loveliness a pledge that He who had so clothed the bird of the jungle would not leave His child uncared for. Walter had to light his fire, and cook his food, as well as provide it. His kitchen was the open air; his oven—native fashion—was formed of dried mud, and was of the simplest construction. The apparatus comprised merely a few brass vessels, and an iron plate for cooking *chapat-*

*ties.** While the pheasant was being stewed, Walter proceeded to prepare this simple substitute for the bread, which was a rare luxury in Santgunge. Skilled as he was by practice, round balls of dough in Walter's hand were successively patted out and flattened, then spread on the heated iron and turned, till a nicely browned chapattie was ready. Walter, engaged in his humble occupation, and absorbed in thoughts quite unconnected with chapatties, did not notice the sound of a horse's hoofs, and was rather startled by the loud voice of its rider, which suddenly broke on the silence.

* Flat unleavened cakes.



CHAPTER II.

A SUDDEN CHANGE.

“**K**OI HAI? any one there?” the usual summons to a servant in India, brought Walter to his feet. Turning, he saw in the horseman, splendidly mounted, who appeared before him, a gentleman whom he had only once met before, about three months previously, but whom he instantly recognised. Walter would have done so had thrice as many years intervened since the meeting.

For Dermot Denis was not one to be quickly forgotten. He was upwards of six feet in height, and with form graceful as well as powerfully built. A quantity of thick curly hair, of a tint that might be called golden, surmounted an intelligent face, both handsome and pleasant, whose grey eyes sparkled with life and fun. Walter had, as has been mentioned, seen Denis but once before; but it was under circumstances that had made a deep impression on his mind.

It had been a time of great trouble amongst the native Christians of Santgunge. Their crops had utterly failed. Their missionary was sinking under a slow and painful disease. Mr. Gurney, who felt the trials of his people more than his own, desired Walter to pay a visit to an official at the nearest station, which was fifteen miles away, to try to induce him to give some relief. It was a commission distasteful to the youth. He disliked playing the beggar, and had no faith in his own powers of persuasion. It was shyly that he told his father's message to the official, whom he found entertaining the handsome Irishman.

"I wish I could do more for your people," said the official, placing five rupees on the table; then, as if changing the subject, he turned and said, "Let me introduce you to Mr. Dermot Denis, an Irish gentleman, who, having more time and money on his hands than he knows what to make of, has come to India in search of adventures. Mr. Denis, this is the son of a missionary who, for twenty years, in a desolate jungle, has devoted his life to attempts to convert the natives."

The cordial shake of the young Irishman's hand which followed this introduction was gratifying to Walter, and still more so was the currency note for a hundred rupees which was frankly and pleasantly

given. Walter could hardly utter a word of thanks, but his heart felt deeply grateful. Joyfully he bore back the large contribution, which his sick father received almost with tears, as a gift from heaven.

"God bless the generous donor!" he faltered.

"O father! I wish that you could have seen him!" exclaimed Walter, with the enthusiasm of youth. "I never met with any one like him, he looked so bright and brave! How noble he must be in whom wealth and position have raised no pride, one who gives without being asked, and in a manner so frank and kind!"

The parting words of Denis to Walter had been, "I'll some day invade you in your jungle, and see the fruits of your good father's attempts to manufacture monkeys into men."

And now the Irishman had kept his promise. Walter eagerly went forward to meet him, wrung his hand warmly, and in few words told him of the heavy loss which he himself had sustained.

"And you're here all alone!" exclaimed Denis, as he dismounted; "just call your *sais* (groom); my man has fallen desperately ill on the road—I had to leave him behind."

"I am my own *sais*, and will be yours," said Walter, laying his hand on the horse's bridle to lead it away.

“Groom and cook too? you’re a clever fellow!” cried Denis, gaily. “I’m glad that I’ve caught you just at dinner-time, for I’m desperately hungry. Just returned from a long expedition, riding day and night from dawn to sunset. I’ll just turn into the house and have a smoke, whilst you look after the bay.”

Even had Walter had no reason to feel grateful towards Denis, he was much too hospitable to grudge the stranger a share of the dinner which was to have lasted himself for two meals, though he had had nothing but chapatties on the previous day, and it was doubtful when he would again be able to procure anything more substantial.

When Walter re-entered the dwelling, carrying with him the stewed pheasant and chapatties, he found his guest seated at his ease on a chair, with his feet on the table, smoking. Denis threw away his cigar, put down his feet, and applied himself with vigour to the occupation of eating his dinner, demolishing more than two-thirds of the pheasant, whilst talking all the time.

“A most unlucky chance for me, my fellow’s falling ill!” he exclaimed. “He was a regular brick; could jabber several languages, was clever at everything—of course cheating his master included. I daresay that he shammed sickness, because he had

no fancy to go where I am going. How to supply his place I know not. By-the-by, do you happen to know anything of Pushtoo? *

"I know it pretty well," replied Walter, who was a very good linguist; "Afghans frequently pass this way; we have had one here for weeks who has just recovered from a troublesome illness, and is going back to his home. He is a Kandahar man."

"A Kandahar man!" exclaimed Denis eagerly. "That's just what I wanted. Do you think that he would act as my guide into Afghanistan?"

"You do not mean that you think of crossing the border?" said Walter in surprise.

"Cross it? yes, and go a great way beyond it—as far as Kandahar, possibly to Kabul; I have a great object before me," said Denis, mysteriously lowering his voice.

"You are hardly aware of the danger——"

"Danger!" interrupted Denis, "I revel in danger. I know that the Afghans, every mother's son of them, are thieves and cut-throats; they slice off your head, and then——"

"And then?" said Walter, smiling.

"You have something to put into a book."

Walter could not help laughing at the Hibernian's bull; but resuming his grave expression he

* The language of the Afghans.

observed, "I do not think that you fully know what you would undertake."

"I know everything!" cried Denis, a little impatiently; "I've had it all dunned into me by every one whom I've met, but all I've heard only strengthens my resolution to go. I'm sick of travelling about in a place like India, where every black fellow saláms you, and vows he's your slave. I've done India thoroughly all round; seen all that's to be seen, and much more. I've visited no end of Hindu mosques and Mohammedan temples, have dined with the Viceroy, and taken pot-luck with the Brahmins. Now I want something new and exciting. Besides, as I told you, I've an object in view. I'm going, if all the world should cry 'stay.'" And with a look of stern determination, Denis finished off the last bit of the pheasant.

Then followed a few seconds of silence. It was broken by Denis exclaiming, with the joyousness inspired by a happy thought: "I say, Walter, you will come with me! You know the language, you have made friends with the Afghans; having you with me would increase a thousandfold my chance of getting back with a whole skin. You're a good shot, I suppose?"—he glanced at a gun in a corner.

"Fair," replied Walter Gurney, who hardly ever missed his aim,

"You have a horse, I suppose?"

"A hill-pony,—not much of a mount."

"But, doubtless, he can keep his legs on the mountains; you're not such a weight as I am, though pretty nearly as tall. Yes, yes, you're just the companion I wanted; a jovial young chap, sticking at nothing, who can ride, shoot, cook, groom a horse, and I daresay shoe it at a pinch, and who will think no more of danger than I do."

The blood mantled on Walter's cheek; he was young, and his heart beat high at the thought of adventures; besides, he knew that it was true that his knowledge of Afghan character, customs, and language, might possibly be the means of even saving the life of his imprudent friend, who scarcely opened his lips without making a blunder. Denis saw Walter's look of hesitation, and eagerly pushed his advantage.

"We'll strike a fair bargain!" the Irishman cried. "You go with me for one or two months, and I'll take you back with me to England. You're poor—there's no disgrace in that; I happen to have a full purse; I'll share with you as if you were my brother. I'll see to your education, and start you in life; you shall never know a want whilst Dermot Denis has a sovereign left. It's a bargain! Give me your hand on it, old boy!" And Denis stretched out his own.


How rapidly thoughts fly through the mind—more rapidly than fingers can trace them! “Is not this an answer to my prayer?” thought Walter. “A few minutes ago I felt, as regards earth, friendless, penniless, desolate! At once, how unexpectedly a friend and the means of future independence are given me! If I risk something, is it not for a hero, a benefactor, one who has shown me kindness unsought! Then the journey itself may be an opening for good. My father often expressed hopes that a day might come when mission-work might be pushed on beyond the frontier—the Afghans were frequently in his prayers. May I not hope to carry the Gospel to some of the wild people of the mountains, several of whom have enjoyed the hospitality of my parent, and received some instruction from his lips. I believe that my ‘fiery cloudy pillar’ is moving towards the hills.”

“How long will you keep me with my hand stretched out like a sign-post, waiting till you come to a decision which I see that you have jumped at already?” the Irishman cried.

Walter grasped the strong, sun-burnt hand. The silent bargain was concluded; no signed and sealed bond could have made it more firm, at least as regarded the missionary’s son.

CHAPTER III.

GILDING RUBS OFF.

N interruption now occurred in the arrival of two large heavily-laden mules with their drivers.

"Ah, there comes my luggage at last!" exclaimed Denis, jumping up from his seat, and going forth to meet them. "I hope, Walter, that your goods and chattels will pack into the very smallest dimensions, for as my beasts have as much as they can bear, they can't well carry very much more."

"A case of 'The last feather breaks the camel's back,'" observed Walter.

"I never could make out the sense of that proverb," said the Irishman. "I'd put the *last feather first*, and the camel would not so much as feel it."

Walter glanced at the speaker to see if he were in jest or earnest; but Denis's handsome face betrayed no consciousness that he had been talking nonsense.

"My pony," said young Gurney, "can carry the few things which I shall require; I shall walk, and lead it."

Dermot Denis was busy with one of his trunks which had been removed from the mule and placed on the ground. He extracted from it a corkscrew and a bottle of brandy, and with these returned to the house, followed by Walter.

"I'm glad that the rascals brought the mules in time," said the Irishman, seating himself, and applying the screw to the cork. "You and I must finish our dinner with a 'dhrop of the cratur,' as my countrymen say."

"Thanks; but I never taste wine or spirits."

"Oh, nonsense; if you've never done it yet, you must do it now, if only for good fellowship. You've not been ass enough to take the pledge, I suppose?" Denis had the bottle between his knees, and out came the cork.

"Excuse me for two minutes," said Walter, and he went hastily into the inner apartment. There on a table lay his Bible, his desk, and a few scattered papers and books.

"Here is a new danger," said Walter to himself. "I had better do at once what I have often thought of doing." He opened his Bible, dipped his pen, and in a firm bold hand wrote on the fly-leaf, "I

declare that I will never, except by medical advice or at communion, let a drop of alcohol pass my lips." Walter signed the declaration, added the date, and returned to the room where Denis was mixing his brandy and water. The Irishman pushed the bottle towards him. "I have taken a pledge," said Walter.

"When did you take it?"

"I took it just now."

Denis gave a little whistle of surprise. Walter had made up his mind that his friend would be angry at opposition from one so much his inferior in age and position; but the frank face of Denis did not look angry, it had only an expression of half-contemptuous pity, which was to Walter harder to bear. No man, especially a very young one, likes to be thought weak-minded by the companion to whom he looks up. It was the doubt how he himself could bear perpetually to oppose himself to the wishes of his benefactor that had made Walter take the decided step of signing the pledge. "Well, you're the loser, I'm the gainer, for my liquor will last the longer," said Denis, raising his glass to his lips. "But," he observed, as he set it down empty, "if you fancy that you will curry favour with the Mohammedans by giving way to their nonsensical prejudices regarding wines, you'll find that you

are greatly mistaken. They don't follow their Vedas* at all" (Denis, it appears, did not know any difference between the Vedas and the Koran.) "The Mohammedan drinks on the sly. He sits on his carpet spread on the floor, with his brandy-bottle in one hand and his hookah in the other, and drinks till he rolls under the table." Denis spoke authoritatively, as one who knows a great deal more about Eastern habits than a youth who had spent all his years in India. Walter did not care to contradict him. Half-an-hour before Denis had been a hero in his eyes; the gilded image of a chivalrous knight was already losing a little of its brightness.

"Now, take me to your Kandahar man; I'll strike my bargain at once. He shall guide us through the Afghan passes."

Walter led the way into the native village, which was not many steps distant from what had been the home of the pastor. It was much like other villages in India—a congregation of mud-huts, with not a pane of glass to be seen, but was somewhat cleaner than those of the heathen. One small, neat building of brick, with a bell hung aloft, showed that it possessed a place for Christian worship. Swarthy natives came out of what Denis

* Hindu Scriptures.

called their ant-hill; women stood in the doorways, to stare at the unwonted sight of a European stranger. There were swarms of children of both sexes and all ages, who received many a kind word from Walter as they stood smiling and saláming.

"Fancy passing all one's life among such as these!" exclaimed Denis, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you dignify these bare-footed blackies by the name of Christians?"

"My father has baptised more than forty," replied Walter, "but the majority——"

"Where's the Kandahar fellow?" asked Denis, who had no taste for anything like a missionary report.

Walter led the way into a mud-built dwelling. The Irishman did not stoop his tall form sufficiently to avoid knocking his head as he entered, and in the semi-darkness stumbled over a recumbent calf which shared the dwelling. Hanif, the Afghan, wrapped in a blanket, was lying on his *charpai*.*

Conversation was at once entered upon by Denis, Walter acting as his interpreter. The Afghan looked astonished at the opening sentences, and burst forth into rapid, excited utterances.

"What on earth is the fellow saying?" asked Denis with impatience.

* Native bedstead.

"He is vowing by his Prophet's beard that he will not undertake to guide you; that the Feringhee* must be mad to think of crossing the frontier. Hanif declares that if you *did* reach Kandahar by his means, he would be bastinadoed, or lose his hand or his head; and that if you were murdered on the way, the Feringhees would insist on his being hanged, however innocent he might be. Really," said Walter, in a tone of expostulation, "I think that there is some reason in what the man says. I wish that you would turn your thoughts in some other direction."

"Give your advice when it's asked for," said Denis, pettishly. "If you're afraid to accompany me, I let you off your agreement. You may stay and vegetate here amongst your niggers."

"I am not afraid," commenced Walter, who was a good deal nettled; "but——"

His new friend cut him short: "Tell the fellow I'll pay him treble what he could fairly demand. Afghans would do anything for gold."

And so it proved. Hanif's eyes glistened at the thought of the large payment offered; and as the *bará sahib* (great gentleman) was evidently so rich, perhaps an idea of helping to relieve him of some of his goods by the way made the Pathan

* Natives call Europeans Feringhees.

less reluctant to run some risk. Was he not accustomed to hazard his life for *loot* (plunder)? So the bargain was struck; the party were to start early on the following morning.

Denis returned to the house. Walter remained to make arrangements with a respectable Christian native employed as a catechist as to the care of his own trifling property during his absence. He gave him the keys of the dwelling, to which some missionary might perhaps be sent before long.

The little church-bell was rung—such was the custom at Santgunge—to gather the native Christians for devotions before they retired to rest. As, surrounded by simple worshippers, Walter joined in the praise and the prayer, again he solemnly devoted himself to his God, before proceeding on what might prove to be a dangerous journey. Then, after exchanging kind words and good wishes with those who loved him for his father's sake as well as his own, the missionary's son returned to his dwelling.

Denis, having had his own way, had quite recovered his temper, and was in exuberant spirits when Walter joined him.

“I wondered how long you were going to leave me to my own meditations, with no light but that of my cigar, while you enjoyed the intellectual con-

versation of your niggers, so soon to be exchanged for company so insipid as mine!" he said, laughing, as Walter entered the room.

Young Gurney, by lighting a lamp, soon dispelled the darkness. In the gaiety of his heart Denis drew his chair closer to Walter's, and was inclined to be quite confidential.

"I don't mind telling you, old boy—for I know you'll be silent as the grave—what is my great object in pushing on beyond the border. You'll not breathe a word to a soul alive."

"Mr. Denis," said Walter, "we are going amongst Afghans, one of whose characteristics is intense curiosity. We shall be questioned and cross-questioned on every point, and often silence is in itself a reply."

"Oh, I'm a match for Afghans!" cried Denis lightly; "I can lie like a Persian—only, unluckily, I don't know the language they lie in!"

"I do know the language, and I cannot lie," observed Walter; "therefore I had better be in ignorance of anything that you wish to remain concealed."

"You mean that ignorance would be bliss to you, and safety to me!" cried Denis. "You would not wilfully let the cat out of the bag, but you could not help her mewling in it. Well, be it as you

wish; I will not reveal to you my great object. But—oh! here's just what I want, a supply of paper; I've a bottle of ink, and pens, but I quite forgot the paper!" Denis's hand was upon about a quire of letter-sized paper, on the first six or seven pages of which something had been written, which he was about to tear off in order to throw them away.

"Hold!" exclaimed Walter hastily, laying his hand on the Irishman's arm. "That's valuable; that's my father's writing,—a translation of the Gospel into Pushtoo which he began but never lived to finish. You shall have other paper. I mean to take this with me," and he put the manuscript into his bosom.

"Now there's one thing I want to say to you, Walter Gurney," began Dermot Denis, looking his companion full in the face; "you've been brought up in the midst of a great deal of religious talk with all sort of puritanical notions, till I daresay you think it a deadly sin to look at a bottle, or dance a polka, or shuffle a pack of cards. You're welcome to your thoughts if you keep them to yourself. But we're going amongst a pack of rabid Moslems, and if they come on the subject of religion, the least contradiction on your part will make them fly at our throats. I'm not going to wave a

red flag in the face of a bull. If the bigots question me I'll say I'm a philosopher, with no particular notions; that will save me from all the troublesome arguments on ticklish subjects that I don't understand. And I desire you'll do just the same."

Walter coloured to the roots of his hair, but he returned with steady firmness the gaze of his comrade. "I'll never deny my faith," he said, laying his clenched hand on the table; "in religious matters I will be in bondage to no man, and if God gives me an opportunity of speaking a word for Him, I can never engage to be silent. If you do not accept this condition, sir, it will be impossible for me to remain your companion."

Denis tried to laugh off his annoyance, but there was more of irony than of mirth in his laugh. "Hear how the young cock crows!" he cried, "when hardly out of the shell. He'll sing a different note when his feathers are grown. Good-night, my puritanical friend, I'm going to bed; as we start to-morrow, I hope that you'll awake in the morning a wiser and a merrier man." And taking up the solitary lamp, Denis retreated into the inner room, leaving Walter Gurney to darkness and his own reflections.

These reflections were by no means agreeable. If

the gilded image of a knightly man had before appeared dimmed to Walter, it was now as if fragments dropping off from what had seemed like armour had betrayed the plaster of Paris beneath. When Walter had grasped the hand of Denis as a pledge that he would, if needful, follow him to the death, the Irishman had appeared to him in the light of a hero, generous, gallant, and noble—a Cœur de Lion, Bayard, Sir Philip Sidney in one. Walter, with boyish enthusiasm,—for he was little more than a boy,—had imagined his handsome young benefactor, protector, and friend, all that he desired him to be. They had now been but a few hours together, and the youth had already seen folly, vanity, selfishness, and a want of principle in his companion. Walter would fain have recalled the feelings with which he had welcomed his friend, and accused himself of ingratitude, fickleness, and presumption for so quickly altering his opinion of one whom he still desired to honour, for he still felt strongly disposed to love him.

But Walter's judgment was not now in fault. He was simply beginning to see Denis as he actually was. Not that the bold, dashing traveller was what the world would regard as a bad man; on the contrary, he was made to be its favourite. Brought up in the atmosphere of a pleasant home, Denis was

addicted to no particular vice. He was said to bear a high character, and to be liberal almost to a fault. Yes, Denis was liberal when to be so cost him no sacrifice of self-love. He could throw a sovereign to a beggar, but he would not have parted with his last cigar even to his dearest friend. But Denis had no very dear friend. As his judgment was shallow, so his affections were weak. He was almost an exemplification of the witty description of a man whose heart is the exact size of his coffin—it can hold nothing but himself. Denis's ruling passions were vanity, selfishness, and an intense thirst for admiration. He had had too much of the last-mentioned sweet poison already, and to imbibe it seemed a necessity of his nature. It was this, and love of excitement which made the young Irishman undertake dashing adventures. He would rather have been talked about for his faults and follies than not be talked about at all.



CHAPTER IV.

FAIRLY STARTED.

THE two companions shared the single sleeping apartment in the small house. Thus Walter could not but observe that Denis commenced the day on which a dangerous journey would be begun without anything like prayer. It was no small effort to Walter to bow the knee when he felt that Denis's eyes were watching his movements, and that the gay adventurer would be likely to despise the spirit of devotion which he did not himself possess. Walter was much disposed to go out into the jungle, and there—alone with his God—pour out his supplications for his friend as well as himself. But conscience told Walter that it was chiefly moral cowardice that prompted the love of solitude. He remembered, that thrown closely together as he and Denis must be for a considerable length of time, it was far better to meet the difficulty at once, and openly show his colours. After Walter's usual reading of the Scriptures, he therefore knelt down, and

in silent but earnest supplication committed himself to his Heavenly Guide. The youth confessed his own weakness, and asked for strength, for grace never to be ashamed of his religion, whether in the presence of those who might mock, or those who might threaten. The missionary's son rose with a spirit refreshed. Denis had left the apartment. Walter knew not how his comrade regarded his conduct. If he could have read the mind of Denis he would have seen there a feeling of slight annoyance, for if anything can make a worldly man's conscience uneasy, it is the contrast between his own carelessness and the earnestness of another. But Denis had not at all a troublesome conscience—it scarcely ever gave token of its existence. The Hibernian thought exceedingly well of himself. One thing on which he prided himself was his tolerance; he extended it so widely that it embraced every form of spiritual error, and made him yield a little indulgence even to the devotion of what he would call a narrow-minded puritan like Walter Gurney.

When Walter went forth, he found his companion giving directions in most imperfect Urdu to the mule-drivers.

"Oh, come here and make these stupid fellows understand me," cried Denis; "they've no more brains than the beasts that they lead."

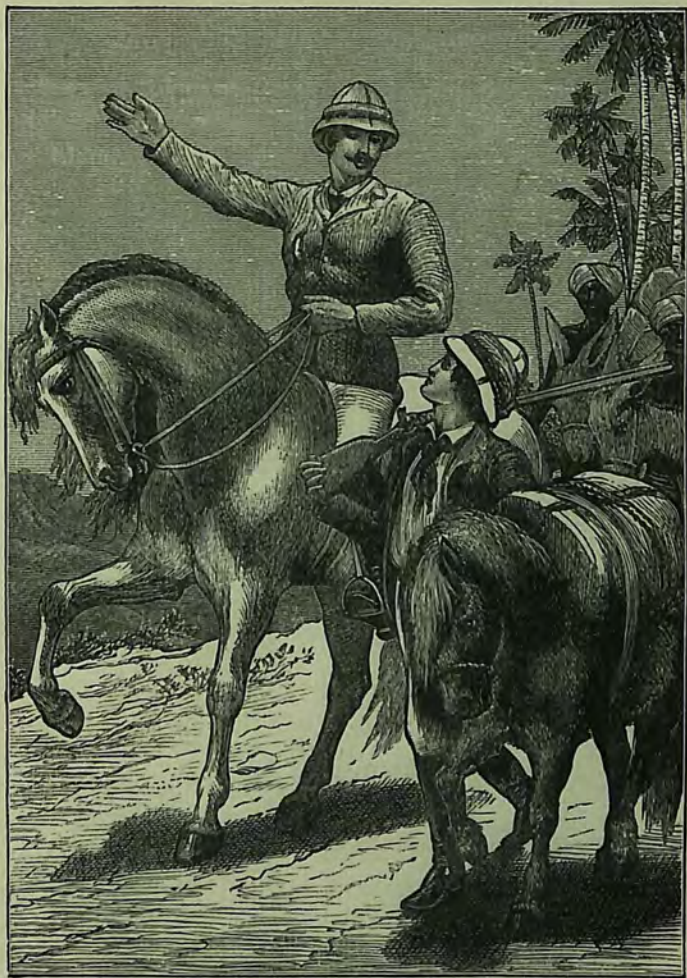
A few intelligible words from Walter soon made matters clear. "Are we to start at once, Mr. Denis?" he inquired.

Oh, don't 'Mister' me, as Rob Roy said," cried the Hibernian, in his frank, pleasant tone. "We're sworn brothers in the field; you're Walter, and I Dermot Denis."

When Walter saw the young Irishman again, mounted on his beautiful steed, in the pride of his manly strength, the breeze playing with the golden locks which curled beneath his white helmet-shaped *topi*,* and the picturesque folds of muslin which enwreathed it, again the feeling of admiration came back to the heart of the youth like a tide that had but ebbed for a while. Denis, fearless in heart and buoyant in spirit, appeared again as the *preux chevalier*, the bravest of the brave.

Walter felt leaving his childhood's home, with its dear though mournful recollections, and the native friends who had known him from his birth. With simple affection they crowded around to bid him farewell, and invoke blessings on the missionary's son. It was not till he had left the villagers behind that sadness in Walter's breast gave place to emotions more natural to youth. Then came a

* A kind of hat specially constructed to protect the head from the sun.



"Denis talked of the voyage to England, and Walter's heart leaped at the thought of being 'on the blue waters of the boundless sea.'"—p. 39.

rebound from the long depressing influence of sorrow and care—a sense of freedom, a joyousness of hope. Few but have known the keen enjoyment of starting on a journey with a lively, amusing companion, and some have experienced the added zest which a little difficulty or even peril bestows. There are those to whom

“If a path be dangerous known,
The danger’s self is lure alone.”

This was eminently the case with the light-hearted Hibernian; and Walter shared the pleasant excitement. Then the future, which had been so dark before, shone out glittering before him like the snow-capped mountains in front. Denis talked of the voyage to England, and Walter’s heart leaped at the thought of being, for the first time in his life, “on the blue waters of the boundless sea.” He had often longed to hear the dash of the ocean waves, and inhale the briny breezes. England, too, was in prospect. The youth intensely desired to behold the mother-land. He had often pictured to himself the white cliffs of Albion, and awoke with a sigh from day-dreams of success in a college career. Now things that, not twenty-four hours before, had seemed well-nigh impossible of attainment, appeared to eager hope to have come almost within reach of his grasp.

The grand scenery through which Walter was passing, the lively conversation of Denis when he could sufficiently curb his own patience and that of his horse to accommodate its pace to a walk, combined to make that morning march one of the bright spots in the life of young Gurney. When, on passing the frontier, Denis put spurs to his steed, and waving his right arm, shouted "Afghanistan at last!" his companion caught the infection of his exultation, and nothing for the time seemed more enjoyable than this wild foray into a dangerous land.

A noonday halt was needed, both on account of the heat and the weariness of men and beasts. Denis selected a charming spot under the shadow of a high rock for the travellers' bivouac. A sparkling streamlet, dancing over pebbles, supplied the means of both bathing and relieving thirst. The tired mules were unloaded, saddles and bridles were removed from horse and pony; the animals were tethered and allowed to crop the herbage around them, after their thirst had been slaked.

One of the trunks was opened, and gave ample proof of Denis's skill in providing for travelling comfort. There was a store of small tin canisters containing a variety of articles of food, some of them unknown even by name to the missionary's son. Truffles, turtles, oysters, anchovies, potted

game, tongues, and pickles, gave a choice of delicacies to Walter, only perplexing by its abundance. He quickly prepared a meal, while Denis, stretched on the ground, amused himself by writing notes of his journey, or refreshed himself with a cigar.

"I say, who are these advancing?" he playfully cried, as a party of Afghan women carrying baskets of fruit appeared descending the road; "not very formidable opponents, I guess, nor carrying very terrible weapons. Walter, are you prepared for a *charge*!"

The women stopped to stare at the Feringhee strangers. Denis hardly needed an interpreter; he held up a bag and jingled rupees, then signed to the women to put down their baskets, and pointed significantly towards his own mouth.

"I'm getting on with the language bravely!" Denis gaily cried. "Walter, these women understand my questions without my speaking a word."

The baskets were quickly emptied of the fruit for which Kabul is famous. Denis, notwithstanding his companion's remonstrances, paid for his purchases a price which astonished the Afghans.

"Some great Feringhee lord!" they remarked to each other.

The dinner was by this time ready. "Let's set to!" cried Denis, whose appetite was keen.

Again recurred the difficulty which, trifling as it may appear, is one that so often meets the Christian on his first mingling with the world, that to sensitive minds it becomes a real cross. Walter had always been accustomed to return thanks before meals from the time when his mother had first put his little hands together, and he had lisped after her the words which his lips could hardly frame. So strong had the habit become, that before dinner on the previous evening Walter had said grace as a matter of course at his own board, without even thinking whether his guest could object. He knew Denis better now; he had met the supercilious glance which had been to him like a sting. Was there any need to obtrude his religion on one who could not understand it? Was not faith a private matter between a man and his God? So whispered the ever-ready Tempter. But a few Scripture words recurred to the mind of the youth—*Let your light shine before men*; and with an effort which cost Walter more than it would have done to face a real danger, in a low, but audible voice he said, "Thanks to God for all His mercies bestowed through Christ our Lord."

"He who prepares the meal considers, I sup-

pose, that he should finish off by saying the grace," observed Denis lightly. "As for me, I never pretend to be one of your saints."

It is remarkable how many men seem to plume themselves on making no profession of religion, as if hypocrisy were the only vice to be shunned. We do not admire a beggar for parading his rags, and declaring that he does not profess to be rich; and who is so destitute as he who has no portion in the world to come! We do not think the debt of gratitude to a bountiful father repaid by his son's openly declaring that he neither loves nor honours his parent! Surely those who with self-complacency avow that they make no profession of religion, and never pretend to be saints, may be reckoned amongst such as "glory in their shame."

After a long halt, partly passed in sleep, the march was resumed. Progress was necessarily slow, as the mules could not travel fast, and it was desirable that the party should keep together. The pass was wild and desolate; little appeared to denote that travellers ever passed that way, save here and there the skeleton of bullock or mule. As the shadows of evening fell, the travellers noticed that Hanif seemed to be more on the *qui vive*. The eyes of Denis and Walter naturally followed the direction of the Afghan's, as he glanced

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upwards towards the high cliffs which on either hand bordered the way.

"I say, Walter, I'm sure that I caught sight of two or three heads up yonder—not those of deer!" said Denis, bending from his saddle. "Don't you see something—just above the bush yonder?"

"I see," replied Walter. "Don't you know that it is the nature of vultures to swoop down on their prey?" As he spoke about a score of the powerful birds, flapping their huge wings, rose from the carcase of some animal on which they had been gorging, disturbed by the travellers' approach.

"I have two double-barrelled guns and a brace of revolvers; I could give account of fourteen Afghans," said Denis. "I'll adorn my belt with the pistols, and a gun would be better in my hand than on the back of the mule. You look to the priming of yours. We're no dead sheep for the vultures to prey on."

Perhaps on account of the precautions taken, or the fact that the wild tribes of the mountain were at the time too much engaged in their internecine quarrels, to trouble armed travellers, the place for the night-halt was reached without any interruption, though not without several alarms. All the party were tired, with the exception, perhaps, of Denis, who had ridden when others had walked. A

fire was kindled by Hanif; another, at a short distance, by the muleteers, who were soon engaged in cooking. Walter, on whom all travelling arrangements devolved, lighted a lamp, and looked after the horse and pony. None of the beasts were allowed to stray away from the little encampment. Grain for the horse had been brought with them by the travellers.

"We'll make Hanif our watchman to-night," said Denis, glancing towards the spot where he and the muleteers, smoking hookahs by their own little fire, formed a picturesque group.

"Never trust an Afghan," replied Walter. "You and I must play sentinel by turns."

"All right," said Denis, taking out his costly gold watch. "From ten to four, that will be six hours between us. I never care to sit up late when there's no dancing or fun to keep me alive, so you'll take the first turn—and mind you awake me at one."

Walter, who had walked during the greater part of the day, was exceedingly weary when he began his night-watch, and, long ere it was ended, found it almost impossible to keep his eyes open. He fed the fire, stick by stick, with the wood which he had made the muleteers collect. But it had not been easy to find much fuel, and before midnight no light was left but that of the small hurricane-

lamp below, and the brilliant stars above. Walter thought of the pillar of glory over the camp of Israel, under whose calm radiance the multitudes had slept in calm security. That pillar was but the visible emblem of the power which was watching above him now. In present, as in olden times, *He that keepeth Israel doth not slumber or sleep.* With the thought came calm and restful assurance. Walter spent much of his time of watch in silent prayer.

At length the hand of the old watch which Mr. Gurney the missionary had left to his son, pointed to one. Walter went to the spot where lay the tall form of Denis, wrapped in a large luxurious cloak lined with costly fur. The youth stooped down, and tried to rouse the sleeper, first by his voice, then by his hand.

"It is one o'clock; rise, it is your turn now!" said Walter.

The only sound heard in reply was the heavy breathing of the sleeper.

"Come, come, I can't keep awake longer," said Walter, shaking the Irishman by the shoulder.

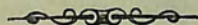
"Just leave me in peace, will you?" was the growled-out expostulation of the drowsy Denis.

"I am too sleepy to play sentinel any longer," said Walter.

"Another hour—just another hour; you roused me from such a delicious dream!" said Denis, turning on his side.

"He rode all day while I trudged on foot," thought Walter, as he resumed his weary watch; but as I am maintained by his bounty, I suppose that I must be content to take the lion's—or rather the mule's share of the burden."

Again and again the youth caught himself nodding. Never, it seemed to him, had watch-hands moved so slowly. The instant that the point of two was reached, Walter was again at the side of Denis.



CHAPTER V.

A ROUGH WAY.

“**H**OLD off, or I’ll blow your brains out!” exclaimed Denis, suddenly starting up to a sitting position, and looking wildly around him. “Oh, Walter, is it only you? I dreamed that I had half-a-dozen Afghans upon me!—why, what is that horrible noise?”

“Only the jackals,” said Walter drowsily, coiling himself up in his rug.

“Dismal noise—worse than the screeching of owls! One would think that some venerable grandfather jackal had departed this life, and that all his descendants had collected together to howl at his wake.”

Walter made no observation; he was already asleep.

He was roused at daybreak to prepare for the morning’s journey. The Europeans did not find it easy to start. The muleteers were unwilling to go forwards, and demanded *bakhshish*,* and leave to

* A present.

return. They refused to reload the mules, though Denis used very strong Hibernian language, which Walter did not care to translate. The fiery young Irishman then used the argument of the stick, which was for the time more effectual.

The mules were laden at last; but scarcely had the party started before one of the beasts of burden was found to be lame. The slowness of progress had sorely tried the philosophy of Denis on the previous day; he now became fiercely impatient at having to curb in his steed to suit a lame mule's halting pace.

"I'd bet anything that sneaking fellow had something to do with the beast's lameness!" he exclaimed. "I'll give him another taste of my cane."

"Mr. Denis—Dermot! nothing is gained, everything hazarded by making enemies of these men!" cried Walter. "That poor creature cannot limp on with its burden; we shall have to leave something behind."

"Put the boxes on your pony," suggested Denis; "your gun, rug, and other light chattels we'll heap on the top of the other mule's burden, and then turn this wretched brute adrift."

"That arrangement will never do," said Walter, who had a good deal more common sense than his older companion. "My pony could not carry a

mule's burden, and the other animal is overladen already. It is absolutely needful to leave something behind. We must part with the least important part of the luggage."

Dermot Denis was reluctant to part with anything. His weapons, of course, must be kept; his ammunition and provision for man and horse by the way, his cooking-vessels and cash—all were necessities not to be left behind. But his choice cigars, his yellow-backed novels, crockery, glass, and plate, his looking-glass, dressing-case, brandy and champagne,—Denis made a fight for each article, was pathetic over his *eau-de-cologne*, and grudged his box of fine soap. A great deal of time was consumed in opening, unpacking, arranging, rearranging, and trying to force down lids on overflowing trunks that obstinately refused to be shut. It was long before the luggage was so readjusted, that one mule, with some help from the pony, could carry the needful part of what had been heavy burdens for two. More than one trunk had to be left behind, and a quantity of most heterogeneous articles strewed the ground—objects of great interest to curious spectators.

For, by twos and threes, a little crowd of most inquisitive Afghans had arrived on the spot. Bejewelled women appeared who had been carrying

burdens—one, in addition, with a child seated on her hip, and another led by the hand. Most picturesque men, swathed in striped blankets, with long black hair hanging wildly over Jewish features, each with a gun in his hand, or a formidable knife stuck in the scarf which he wore as a belt. All looked as if they had never been washed in their lives, but would have made fine subjects for an artist. The articles on the ground were freely handled; an embroidered smoking-cap found its place on the head of a little urchin who had no clothing besides; the silver-topped bottles of the dressing-case were speedily appropriated, and vanished somewhere under the blankets. Denis was indignant at seeing his property disappearing under the very eyes of its owner.

“Walter, I say, drive these harpies away!” he exclaimed in an angry tone.

“We could not do so without using our weapons,” replied Walter; “and were blood once shed, our lives would not be worth a day’s purchase. In Afghanistan revenge is reckoned as a virtue.”

“The Sahib had much better return,” said one of the muleteers, who had been from the first most reluctant to advance.

“The Sahib is a great hero,—the Sahib never retreats,” observed Hanif the Pathan, with a grin.

"Don't trust that man—he's an Afghan; he would urge you to go on," said Walter, as Denis looked to him for an explanation of words which he could not understand.

"I need no urging—I'm resolved to go on; do you think me a weak girl to want to go back now? No, not if I had to go alone."

The Afghans not only used their eyes and their fingers, but they poured forth a volley of questions. "Who were the travellers? whence had they come? whither were they going? Were they merchants? were their camels behind them? why did they go without an escort of armed men?" Such, and many more, were the interrogations made on all sides. Walter had not time to translate half to his comrade.

"Tell them I'm a Feringhee nobleman," cried Denis, "a great friend of their Khan; that he expects me, that I bring him rich presents; that he'll hang any man, woman, or child that dares to lay a finger on my goods!"—he snatched his umbrella from the hand of a boy, and sent him spinning and howling. "Tell them that I've lots of powder and shot, and could bring down a sparrow half-a-mile off, to say nothing of a thief of an Afghan!"

Walter did not think it necessary to give a literal

translation of the words of his angry companion; what he did say could hardly be heard amidst the Babel of voices, for Hanif and the muleteers were all taking on themselves to answer the questions, which they did, in true Oriental style, with wildest exaggerations.

Some of the tin cases of luxuries were on the ground, glittering in the sun. An Afghan seized on one, perhaps in hopes that the metal was silver, wrenched it open, then flung it from him with an exclamation of disgust, and a curse.

"Dogs of *Kafirs*! (unbelievers); they eat the unclean beast!" he cried, surveying the Europeans with a look of intense hatred.

"If we are to proceed, we had better go at once," said Walter to Denis. The Irishman's quick temper was as a lighted cigar, and Gurney saw that those around him were as gunpowder ready for explosion.

"I'm ready to go!" cried Denis fiercely; "but I should like to kick those fellows all round first."

"It is well that they do not understand you," observed Walter Gurney.

Denis mounted his horse, which had attracted many admiring and covetous looks from the Afghans. He shouldered his gun with a very

determined expression, and glanced down significantly at the pistols stuck in his belt.

The party then moved on, the unladed mule with difficulty managing to keep up with the rest. For at least a mile the travellers were accompanied by a most unwelcome escort of Afghans ; more would have come but for the temptation afforded by the *loot* which the strangers had left behind. Denis had insisted on Hanif's carrying for him his valuable fur-lined cloak. At the point where the Europeans at last parted company with the Afghans, Denis looked round for Hanif, but neither the guide nor the cloak were anywhere to be seen !

"The villain has robbed me !" Denis exclaimed.

"One could hardly have expected anything else," thought Walter. Indeed it was rather a matter of surprise to young Gurney that the remainder of the day passed without any attempt at attack. The road had grown steeper, the cliffs higher ; it was at least impossible here to miss the way, as there was no visible opening on either side. Walter felt as if walking, with his eyes open, into a trap ; but even if retreat were possible, he would not for an instant entertain the thought of deserting his friend. The march took longer than that of the previous day, but much less ground had been passed over. Before sunset men and beasts were thoroughly tired out

(always excepting Denis and his high-mettled steed), notwithstanding the mid-day rest.

Again the party bivouacked, and Walter prepared the meal, which was eaten almost in silence. The mishaps of the day had greatly damped the high spirits of Denis.

"I don't care to lie on the bare earth," he said, "with nothing to keep off the night dews. Just lend me your rug."

Walter complied at once with the request, and parted with the only warm wrap in his possession.

The day had been a trying one to the missionary's son; but he had more steel in his composition than had his more excitable friend; Walter was less easily elated than Denis, was less impetuous in action, but had greater power to endure.

Yet Walter felt the need of a brief period of perfect solitude to compose his troubled mind, and hold communion for a-while with the invisible world. No trace of an Afghan was in sight. The rich red glow of the setting sun was bathing cliff and stream, and lighting up with beauty a copse to the right, a little oasis of green in the wild and sterile mountain landscape. This copse formed a tempting place of retreat; Walter would be within call of his travelling companion, yet be completely screened

from observation. He made his way over some stones and tangled brushwood to the spot, buried himself in the copse, and then, in a half-reclining posture, gave himself up to thought.

“How mysterious are the dealings of Providence! When, led by gratitude for past kindness, and hope of future independence, I linked my fortunes to those of the only being on earth who seemed willing and able to help me, I thought that I was following the guidance of the heavenly pillar. Yet into what a desert has it led me! It were childish folly to close my eyes to the fact that it is more than probable that I may never return from this mad expedition; it is more than possible that my blood may stain an Afghan dagger, my body feed the mountain eagles. What then would become of all my cherished hopes of following in my father's steps with (such was my vain presumption) a wider field for missionary enterprise than was given to him upon earth. I would not, I thought, lead so dull, so monotonous a life; I would acquire knowledge, distinction, eloquence, that I might devote every gift to my Master's work, lay every talent at His feet. I hoped to become a sharp and polished instrument to be used for the welfare of men, and I find myself a kind of travelling servant to a man who cannot sympathise in my views, cannot under-

stand my aspirations—a man whom I seem to have no power to influence for good!

“Shall I then doubt the wisdom of Him whose guidance I have sought in prayer; shall I think myself forgotten by my Master even if He let me perish here? No!” and Walter raised his eyes to a light cloud floating above, flushed with the rosy light of the sun, which was itself hidden from view by the tall cliff behind which it had set. “No! *though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!* I have seen the child of fortune stripped of some of the things which he valued; gradually he and I may have to part with all—perhaps liberty, possibly life. But there is that of which no power either of earth or hell can deprive the Christian; *nor life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate him from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord.* Let what will come, my best treasure is safe; *the Lord is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.*”



CHAPTER VI.

THE MOUNTAIN CHILD.

WALTER was startled from his meditations by a sudden rustling in the bushes, followed by a cry of pain or terror, not many yards from the spot where he was reclining. In an instant he was on his feet ; and turning towards the point whence the sound came, Walter saw a very large cheetah (leopard), that had sprung from its covert on an Afghan child, and was trying to carry her off. The little girl was struggling and resisting with all her might, striking at the savage beast with her small clenched hand, while she loudly cried out for help. It was well that help was near, or the struggle would have been short, and its fatal issue certain. Walter had no weapon in his hand ; but unarmed as he was, he dashed through the brushwood to the rescue of the poor child. His short and sudden rush was enough to alarm the cheetah, which seldom, if ever, attacks a man. The wild beast dropped its hold of its prey,

and bounding off, escaped by some unseen outlet from the copse.

Walter went up to the child, and beheld the most beautiful girl on whom his eyes had ever rested. Excitement and the effort of the struggle had added a deeper crimson to her cheeks; her face was scarcely darker than that of a European. Large blue eyes, dilated with fear, fringed with long soft dark lashes, were raised towards her preserver with an eager wistful gaze. The girl's hair, in long rich plaits, fell over her bright red *hurta*, and was adorned with many a silver ornament. Walter was too well accustomed to Oriental taste to think the child's loveliness lessened by the numerous rings which weighed down her little ears, or even the jewel on one side of the delicately formed nose. The child was evidently no poor man's daughter.

The girl did not appear to be seriously injured; her loose sleeve was very much torn, and a few drops of blood fell from one of her arms. The attack and rescue had been the work of but a few seconds.

"You are wounded, my poor lamb!" cried Walter in the Pushtoo tongue, and drawing out his handkerchief he tore it into shreds to bind up the bleeding arm.

"Not a lamb—for I fought it; I struck it! If I'd had a dagger I would have killed it!" cried the

girl with a fierceness which seemed strange in one so young and fair. "I'm an eagle, for I live in the Eagle's Nest!"

With childlike confidence the little Afghan let Walter bind up her arm, looking at him with a curiosity which seemed to overpower every other emotion.

"They say you're a Kafir," she observed; "you're not a dog of a Kafir, you are brave and you are kind."

"How came you to be in the jungle, my child?" asked Walter; "I never saw you till you cried out."

The child smiled as she answered: "You did not see me, nor did you see the cheetah. Wild beasts know how to hide, and so does the wild Afghan."

"Why did you hide?" asked Walter.

I crept down to see what Kafirs are like. They told me that rich white Feringhees were going through the pass, one riding on a beautiful horse. I hope that the horse is not yours?" she added in a tone of inquiry.

"No, the horse is not mine," replied Walter.

"I am glad of that," said the girl.

"And why?" inquired the Englishman.

"Because I should not like to *loot* you."

"Ha! a secret let out!" thought Walter. "Do

you think that poor travellers ought to be looted?" he said aloud.

"No, but *rich* ones should," was the naive reply. "My father says there are big boxes all filled with treasure. He promised to change my silver bracelets for gold ones from the Feringhee's spoils."

Walter was almost as much amused by the frankness of the child, as alarmed by the information which she gave.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Sultána," replied the child, whose queenly manner suited her name. "Sometimes my father calls me his little eagle."

"And who is your father, Sultána?"

"My father is a bold chief, a *bara bahadar* (great hero)," replied the girl proudly. "His foes all dread Assad Khan. When last he came back to the Eagle's Nest from a foray, I saw that two heads hung from his saddle-bow."

"You did not like to see those ghastly heads? you turned away?" said the English youth, his soul revolting from the idea of that beautiful child being connected with scenes of slaughter.

"Why should I turn away? Afghans like to see dead foes. I wish, when I'm old enough, that I could ride about and fight like the Turkestan women!"

"Now, Sultána, you say that your father is a chief. If we travellers came to his fort and asked for food and shelter, would he not give them?" asked Walter, who had almost finished his surgical task."

"Yes, Assad Khan would kill a sheep; he would feast the strangers; Afghans are kind to strangers," replied the girl.

"And your father would send them on their way in safety?" inquired Walter, who had a personal interest in the reply to the question.

"Yes, they would be safe, till they had gone a little distance," said Sultána, a smile rising to her rose-bud lips.

"And then?"

"Then, if they were rich, he would follow and loot them; if they fought—he would kill them."

"Oh, what fearful darkness broods over this land!" thought Walter, "when the very children are trained to delight in deeds of rapine and blood;" and he sighed.

"Why do you sigh?" said Sultána, more gently, laying her little hand upon Walter's. "My father would not cut off *your* head. You saved his little Eagle. I like you—I thank you!" and soft moisture rose in her large blue eyes as she uttered the words.

"Sultána, you have not thanked Him who sent me to save you," said Walter, gently caressing the small, sun-burnt hand.

"Who sent you?" exclaimed Sultána, glancing suspiciously around.

"The great God,—He whom you call Allah."

"Did He send you,—did He speak to you? when? how?" exclaimed Sultána, in great surprise, withdrawing her hand as she spoke.

"I did not hear His voice with my mortal ears; and yet, Sultána, I feel sure, quite sure, that He sent me here to save you. I came into this jungle thinking to be quite alone, that I might talk with God."

"How can you talk with Allah?" cried Sultána, the mystery exciting her curiosity, almost her fear.

"I tell him all my troubles," replied Walter; "I have had many troubles of late, and I thank Allah for helping me through them. I shall thank Him to-night for saving you from the cheetah."

"And does Allah answer?" inquired Sultána, her large eyes fixed inquiringly on the speaker.

"Yes, but in a way that you cannot understand. O Sultána, I am so glad that the Lord both hears me and loves me. I wish that you too would talk with God."

"The Moullahs don't teach us anything like that,"

observed Sultána ; “ they teach us to say ‘ There is one God, and Mohammed is His prophet.’ ” She repeated this moslem confession of faith with the enthusiasm with which its very sound seems to inspire the followers of Islam. “ Is that what you want me to say ? ”

“ No, my child,” said Walter, very gently ; “ I want you to say such words as these : ‘ Allah ! teach me to know Thee ! Allah ! teach me to love Thee ! ’ ”

“ Love ! ” repeated the young Afghan, as if her mind could scarcely take in an idea so new. “ We must obey Allah, and fast in the Ramazan (though my father doesn’t), and those who want to be saints should go and walk round the black stone at Mecca. But *love* ! why should I love Allah ? ”

“ Because He loves you,” replied Walter ; “ I can tell you, for I *know* it, what your Moullahs never have told you, that *God is love*.”

At this moment, a peculiar sound, something like a whistle, was heard from the height above. Sultána started at the sound.

“ They’ve missed me—they’re seeking me ! ” she exclaimed, and with the rapidity of a fawn she sprang away, and disappeared as the cheetah had done, by some unperceived outlet.

It was useless to attempt to follow the child,

especially as the sunset glow had given place to deepening twilight. With rapid steps Walter returned to Denis, whom he found smoking by the fire.

"What on earth were those strange noises that I heard a little while ago?" asked Denis, taking the cigar from his lips; "I heard something like a scramble and a cry, and you shouted from the thicket yonder, and there was, I think, a crashing of bushes. I'd half a mind to come and see what you were after. Did you rouse some wild beast from his lair?"

Walter gave a short account of Sultána's adventure, to which Denis listened with keen interest, bursting into laughter when he heard of the little maiden's intended appropriation of his horse; it was a very brief laugh, however, and by no means one of unmingled mirth.

"And now, Dermot, you see that we are watched, waylaid, that we shall certainly be attacked and robbed by these fierce mountaineers; you must resolve at once on what course to pursue."

"Sell my life as dearly as I can," muttered Denis, grasping one of his pistols.

"No; mount your horse, your good fleet horse, and make your way back with all speed, under the cover of night. Your animal is not knocked up

like ours. He may at least bear you far enough to place you beyond immediate pursuit. You must of course abandon your property, and it may serve to satisfy for a time the rapacity of these wolves. I do not think that the muleteers, who will not attempt to fight, run any serious risk; they will merely lose the beasts. But you—you must not delay for an hour your escape back to India."

"Escape back to India!" exclaimed Denis, indignantly starting to his feet. "What do you take me for, boy? Do you think that I, Dermot Denis, am the man to run off from the shadow of danger like a cur that flies yelping away if you do but lift up a stone. Do you think that I am the man to endure being twitted with having begun an enterprise which I had not the spirit to carry out, a man to save his own neck by leaving his comrade to be murdered by these brutal Afghans!"

"My danger is less than yours," observed Walter. "In the first place I have the protection of poverty; in the second I have made friends with the child of a chief."

"What a bit of luck for us!" exclaimed Denis, in a completely altered tone, throwing himself again on the ground beside the glowing embers of the fire. "I certainly was born under some auspicious star! No sooner do I lose my rogue of

a guide, than up starts a powerful chief to act both as guide and protector. Of course I'll be hand and glove with this Assad Khan ; he'll introduce me at Kandahar as his most particular friend. Of course I'll make him no end of promises,—one must never be sparing of them. I'll tell the chief that when I get back to India, I'll send him my horse—a free gift—and half-a-dozen others loaded with jewels for pretty Sultána. I'll make it the chief's interest to stand my friend. I'll see more of Afghan life than any being in the world ever saw before. Stay, stay, I must write up my journal ; where have I put my ink-bottle ? ”

Denis, now in wild spirits, wrote for about five minutes as if writing for life ; he then threw down his pen, and pushed the paper from him. “ That's enough for to-night, I shall have plenty of time to-morrow to write up my story.”

“ Will he have plenty of time ? ” thought Walter to himself. “ Is not my gay, bold comrade beset with dangers not the less real because he chooses to shut his eyes as he takes the leap which may land him—one shrinks from asking *where* ! I am the only Christian near him, the only being who can speak to him of that soul which may so soon be required. And yet, coward and faithless friend that I am, I sit, as it were, with lips sealed, watching

his career towards the precipice over which he so soon may plunge with a laugh on his lips ! ”

“ Dermot,” said Walter, aloud ; “ even you must own that our lives are uncertain.”

“ Yes ; it’s a toss up whether you and I ever see old Ireland again.”

“ Is it not well to be prepared for whatever may happen ? ”

“ Yes ; I’ve looked both to my guns and pistols,” was Denis’s reply.

“ It was not that which I meant. I was thinking of what follows death.”

“ You don’t want me surely to set about making my will ? ” exclaimed Denis. “ It is not needed ; if I die my estate must go to my brother.”

“ I am not speaking of worldly property. I was thinking that you—that we both—need to know more of God’s will, that we may be ready, should He please to call us suddenly.” Walter took his small pocket Testament from his bosom. “ I am going to read my evening chapter ; would you have any objection to my reading aloud ? ”

“ None in the world,” replied Denis, lightly ; “ but I can’t promise to listen.”

Walter selected his chapter, and selected well. Never before had he so realised the force of the expression, “ Preaching as a dying man to dying

men." Walter knew that at that moment stealthy foes might be creeping towards them under the cover of darkness, or that his reading might be interrupted by a sudden volley from the thicket or the heights above it. But the feeling of peril which solemnised the young Englishman did not at all un-nerve him; Walter drank in the meaning of each life-giving verse which he read. His companion's perfect silence encouraged Walter, till—when he closed the book—he turned to look at Dermot Denis, and saw him sunk in a deep slumber.



CHAPTER VII.

THE STRUGGLE COMES.

WALTER'S strange interview with the child of the Eagle's Nest had strengthened the missionary spirit in the young man's breast. He went over in thought every circumstance of their brief meeting during the long hours of his night-watch. On this occasion Walter felt no disposition to sleep ; physical discomfort, combined with mental anxiety to take away all desire for repose. The wind had arisen, and, rushing through the pass as through a funnel, extinguished the fire, put out even the hurricane-lamp, and chilled the frame of the young sentinel. Dermot Denis, with characteristic thoughtlessness, had appropriated the rug of his friend. Though the day had been hot, there was sharp keenness in the night wind, and young Gurney missed his usual protection. It was only by motion that he could keep up any degree of warmth. As Walter paced up and down, now facing the furious blast, now

almost swept down by its violence, watching the wild lightning-illuminated clouds above him, as they seemed in their rapid course to blot out star after star, Walter's spirit yearned over the Afghan child in the power of the king of darkness.

"One wearing almost the form of an angel is developing the instincts of a tigress," muttered Walter to himself. "Eyes that can express so much of feminine tenderness can look complacently at what a Christian girl would turn from with sickening horror! A heart made to reverence what is holy and love what is good, a kindly—yes, I am sure of it—a kindly affectionate heart, is filled with bigotry and pride, and a debasing hunger after plunder won by red-handed violence! Oh, what hath not Satan wrought in this miserable land; and not only here, but over the widest tracks of this fallen but beautiful earth! Millions of victims are lying in worse than Egyptian bondage, whilst those who could carry to them the message of deliverance are, as it were, quietly pasturing their sheep amongst the comforts of civilised life. Oh for the voice from the burning bush that gave His commission to Moses! Oh for the power to say to the murderer of souls—*Let My people go that they may serve Me.* Lord! how long, how long shall Thy servants rest in selfish indifference whilst

generation after generation perishes in darkness and sin ! If it please Thee to prolong my life, let it be the one object of that life to glorify Thee by rescuing souls through the power of Thy spirit ; it is the object best worth living for—the object best worth dying for ! Where does the fiery pillar lead the believer but along the path consecrated by the track of the Saviour's own footsteps. He came to seek and to save the lost."

Very fervently did Walter Gurney plead on that tempestuous night for Sultána and her guilt-stained race. The sense of personal danger was almost lost in the intense realisation of the spiritual peril of others. In wrestling supplication on that wild, stormy night the hours wore away. Walter felt himself in the immediate presence of One who could say to the wilder storm of human passion, the sweeping blast of satanic power, *Peace, be still !* Whatever outward circumstances may be, these are blessed hours that are spent alone with God ; they are hours whose result will be seen through countless ages, when corresponding to the fervour of prayer will be the rapture of praise !

Walter had no difficulty on this night in arousing Dermot Denis. Partly on account of the boisterous weather, partly from anticipation of a possible attack, the young Irishman's sleep had been broken

and disturbed. Ever and anon he would start, as if his mind were still on the watch.

"It's miserably cold!" said Denis, as he rose to take his turn as watcher. "The wind howls and yells and shrieks as if bad spirits were riding on the blast! This wretched rug is but a poor substitute for the fur cloak carried off by that Afghan thief!"

"It is a good deal better than nothing," remarked the shivering Walter, as he stretched his weary limbs on the cold, bare ground.

The wind lulled as the morning drew near, and Walter was able to sleep. Just at daybreak he was suddenly wakened by the loud report of a pistol—another and another. Springing to his feet, Walter beheld Denis struggling on the ground in the midst of a throng of fierce Afghans. Gurney rushed to the aid of his friend, but was instantly struck down by a blow from the butt end of a musket. Long Afghan knives were gleaming around; both the European travellers thought that their last hour was come. Resistance was hopeless, though Denis had wounded two of the robbers ere he fell overpowered by numbers.

"Kill, kill the Kafirs!" was the cry.

"Don't kill—keep us for ransom—take us to the chief Assad!" gasped forth Walter with diffi-

culty, for an Afghan's strong hand was griping his throat.

The word "ransom" acted like a charm upon the assailants; it was passed from mouth to mouth, the thirst for gold overpowering even the thirst for blood. Happily neither of the Afghans whom Denis had shot were mortally wounded, or his life would assuredly have been the forfeit. His bold but useless resistance aggravated the severity of the treatment which he now received at the hands of his cruel captors. Both the prisoners were plundered of their watches, and Denis, who alone wore rings, had them violently wrenched from his fingers. He was stripped to the waist, the gold studs in his shirt exciting the cupidity of the Afghans, who hoped to find more treasure on the person of one so rich. Denis was struck on the face, having first been deprived of his handsome *topi*; his arms were tied tightly behind him, his struggles making the cords cut almost into his flesh. Then, as he lay writhing on the ground, the unfortunate traveller was brutally kicked by his persecutors, who laughed at the vain fury of their victim, who, in his own language, was pouring on them abuse and imprecations.

Walter, partly on account of his poverty, and partly on account of his quietness, had less to endure. When a rude robber was about to strip,

him of his well-worn coat, a younger and more pleasant-looking Afghan interfered.

"Leave him alone," said the young man. "I trow he is the son of the Santgunge Padri, who has shown kindness ere now to Afghans.

"I would not leave him the rag, Ali Khan," cried the man, "if it were fit for my wear. I shall find something better worth having yonder," and off he rushed to join the group who were ransacking Denis's trunk.

Walter was glad indeed to retain his garment, and with it his little Testament, and the leaves of his father's translation, to him a treasure more precious than gold. He, however, had his arms bound behind him, and received his share of Moslem abuse, in which Ali Khan did not join. The captives were witnesses to the glee with which their property was disposed of, not without a considerable amount of loud talking and wrangling over the spoils. The muleteers had fled at the first alarm; their animals were, of course, the booty of the captors. Two Afghans mounted on Denis's horse; how he longed to see it plunge and throw them! The trunks were cut open with daggers, and rudely emptied of their contents. There was a fierce scramble for the gold and silver; a bottle of brandy was surreptitiously carried off beneath the blanket of a fol-

lower of the False Prophet, a mountaineer who had learnt to appreciate the fiery poison. Denis's fine embroidered shirts caused a great amount of mirth, and were pulled over *kurtas* (vests) that had been worn day and night unchanged for years.

When the work of pillage was over, the prisoners were made to rise and accompany their captors to the copse in which Sultána had had her adventure. They were led through it to a steep and precipitous path which was familiar to the Pathans. With their hands bound behind them it was almost impossible for the Europeans to climb so rude an ascent, though both were agile men; but when they paused they were pushed and kicked by the Afghans behind them.

"You must have the use of your hands, Feringhee," said Ali Khan, cutting Walter's cords with his knife.

"Show the same mercy to my unfortunate friend, brave youth!" cried Walter, the sufferings of Denis distressing him more than his own.

"He has shed the blood of my kinsmen; he shall never find mercy from me!" was the stern reply of Ali Khan. "He is like the wild beast that struggles and bites when caught in the snare; thou art calm as a man who submits to fate."

It was a matter of surprise to Walter himself, as

well as to the young mountaineer, that he could preserve such composure under circumstances so painful. We need not seek far for the cause of such calmness. One who habitually looks to the fiery cloudy pillar for guidance, finds that it gives light in the darkest night of trial, shade under the fiercest glow of temptation. All that the Christian holds most dear is beyond the reach of robbers; he can never lose his all. What marvel if that man is patient who knows that all things work together for his good,—and brave when assured that death itself is but the angel that uncloses the gate of paradise.

It was far otherwise with the miserable Denis, who, on account of his bonds, was utterly unable to keep up with Walter and the foremost Afghans, who soon passed beyond his view. As he could not help himself with his hands, his tumbles and slips on a path which at some places “scarce gave footing for the goat,” afforded his tormentors a cause for mirth and added brutality. When, after a painful fall of several feet, Denis obstinately refused to move, he was goaded to stagger again to his feet by the points of daggers.

“Hell itself could not be worse than this! Hell must be like this!” groaned the tortured man. “The company of tormenting demons, the memory

of past joys lost for ever, and the fierce anguish of knowing that my own mad folly has brought me to this,—earth has no misery like mine.” Passages from Scripture hardly ever recurred to the mind of the spoilt child of fortune; but in his anguish Denis did think of one who had been clothed in purple and fine linen, one who had fared sumptuously every day, and at last had to make his bed in the flames. The idea did flash across Denis’s mind, “My fate is something like his.”

The savage Pathans had at last to cut the bonds of Denis; but not from pity, but a selfish fear that their captive, by dying on the way, might escape from their hands without paying a ransom. The latter part of that terrible journey was to Denis like a horrible dream. It was in an almost swooning state that the once splendid-looking young Irishman was led into the rough hill-fort which, from its lofty position, was called the Eagle’s Nest.



CHAPTER VIII.

PRISON LIFE.

A PERSON of weak constitution might have sunk under such sufferings as Dermot Denis had had to endure; but he had a strong and vigorous frame. Walter, who had arrived some time before him, and who saw almost with horror the state of his unfortunate friend, as Denis sank on the floor beside him, was surprised at the rapidity with which the Irishman rallied when he had drained the contents of an earthen vessel which Walter held to his lips.

"I'll live to be revenged on them yet," cried Denis, raising himself to a sitting position, and shaking back the clotted hair from his bruised and bleeding brow.

Walter did all he could for his comrade, but that all was little, as he himself was in a destitute state. He pulled off his own shooting-coat to cover Denis, and by entreaties persuaded Ali Khan to bring a fresh supply of water, which he used in bathing the sufferer's hurts.

Denis surveyed his prison, more to see what chance it afforded him of future escape than what it could yield of present comfort.

Comfort! the word is a mockery! The room, or den, as Denis called it, was about twelve feet square, on an upper storey in the fort. There was a hole on the north side, about five feet above the floor, which admitted air and light; of course it was unfurnished with glass—in that place a luxury unknown. There was not even a scrap of matting on the dirty floor, not an article of furniture of any description; no fittings, unless one strong iron hook, which seemed to have been built into the stone wall, could be reckoned as such. Opposite to the hole was a door, which opened on a kind of ladder-stair which led down into the open court-yard. This court-yard was an irregular square; the side opposite to the prison was bounded by a high strong wall, loop-holed for muskets, with a massive gate in the centre, the only means of access to the fort. The remaining three sides of the quadrangle were supported by rude pillars of unhewn stone, supporting the upper storey. Under these pillars were open recesses, which seemed to be the common abode of the inhabitants of the fort and such animals as they possessed. The cow and her calf, sheep kept for slaughter, poultry, their half-starved

dogs, women busy at their small primitive spinning-wheels, or engaged in cooking operations, men smoking their bubbling hookahs, or cleaning their arms, dirty children wearing more jewels than clothes, occupied these recesses, or the open space of the court. In the centre of all was the well, indispensable in a fort which might any day have to stand a siege in that land of blood-feuds and broils. A medley of sounds arose from the courtyard, barking and bleating, singing and swearing, the crow of the cock and the cry of the child. Such was the scene which the captives surveyed through the open door of their prison.

The view from the window, or rather aperture in the wall, was of a precipice, dotted here and there with thin clumps of brushwood—a precipice so deep that the dwellers in the Eagle's Nest defied an enemy to attack from that side, or a prisoner to make his escape. The window commanded a wild and picturesque view, but the captives were in no mood to think much of scenery then. They saw their den draped with cobwebs, which had hung undisturbed for many long years. Insects crawled over the uneven floor and up the rude stone walls, and the air was alive with mosquitoes. The place presented a terrible contrast to Denis's luxurious home in his own green isle,

Even the gloomy privacy and silence of a prison were unattainable luxuries here. The door of the room occupied by the captives opened from the outside, and Ali Khan, after bringing the water, had unfortunately left it open. A fit of curiosity was on the residents of the fort. Afghans crowded up the narrow ladder-stair to gaze at the unfortunate Feringhees, and load them with insults. The room was crowded almost to suffocation with rude men and mocking, grinning children ; whilst women, staring up from the court-yard, added their laughing comments on the appearance of the captives above. Walter endured the annoyance in silence ; Denis hurled back insult for insult, but happily neither he nor his tormentors understood each other's terms of abuse. This misery lasted for nearly an hour, when happily some arrival in the Eagle's Nest diverted the attention of the intruders, and the Afghans swarmed down the ladder-staircase as hastily as they had swarmed up.

"Walter, a week of this would drive me stark mad !" exclaimed Denis.

"I will ask our good-natured Ali Khan to close the door when he comes next time," said Walter ; and as he spoke the young Afghan appeared with the prisoners' food. This food consisted of a loaf, or rather lump of black bread, most repulsive in

appearance, only half-baked, and the flour of which it was made mixed with bits of straw and grains of sand.

“That stuff is not fit for hounds!” exclaimed Denis; “the very pigs would despise it! I’ve a mind to fling it back at the fellow’s head!”

“Do not make an enemy of the only being who has shown a grain of humanity!” cried Walter. “I suppose that as regards our food, prisoners must not be choosers.” Then turning towards Ali Khan, young Gurney with courtesy inquired who had just arrived in the fort.

“My uncle, our brave chief, Assad Khan.”

Denis caught the sound of the name, and his whole countenance brightened.

“Then it is as I hoped!” he exclaimed; “we are in the hands of a gallant warrior whom we have laid under deep obligation, and who will be delighted to serve us. It is the old story of Androcles and the lion,—gratitude is the one virtue of savages and wild beasts.”

“I hope not confined to them,” said Walter; “nor would I have you build your hopes too high on the gratitude of an Afghan.”

“Bid Ali Khan tell his chief that the preserver of his child is here, and with him his friend, able and willing to reward liberally all who serve him

faithfully. And let him tell Assad Khan that the first favour which I shall ask at his hands is that he should soundly bastinado the ruffians who have robbed, insulted, and imprisoned me here."

Walter translated but a portion of Denis's speech, adding a request to Ali Khan that the prisoners might not be subjected to sudden inroads from crowds, at least till the captives had been granted an interview with the leader.

"I will lock you in," said the youth, "and give the key to no one unless the chief demands it."

The closing of the door was not an unmixed advantage, as it lessened the circulation of air, and excluded from the captives all view of the courtyard. Yet anything, at the time, seemed better than the inroad of Afghan intruders.

Walter took up the black bread, and breaking it into two equal portions, gave one to his comrade. "We need our breakfast," said he.

"You will hardly give thanks over it," observed Denis, with a look of disgust.

"I shall give thanks, heartfelt thanks," replied Walter, with animation, "not merely for food, but for preservation in imminent danger from sudden and violent death!" and, with the bread in his hand, he sank on his knees. Denis, solemnised for a-while, intuitively followed his comrade's example,

and if he did not feel all the gratitude which warmed the breast of his friend, he could at least heartily join in Walter's prayer for help and deliverance. It was perhaps the first time in Dermot's life that he had actually prayed; and even now his desires did not rise above earth.

Thankful to have seen Denis for once on his knees, and hopeful that to him tribulation might prove "an angel in disguise," Walter ate his wretched food with something like relish. Denis was weary and hungry, and left not a crumb of what he had judged unfit for hounds. Both the prisoners then found in the sleep of exhaustion a short respite from trouble.

The rest of the day was spent by Denis in feverish impatience for the visit of the chief from which he hoped so much. He set diligently to work to learn from Walter words and phrases in Pushtoo, finding his ignorance of the language a perpetual source of annoyance. Denis tried to get up speeches full of flowery compliments, and containing splendid offers, which he assured his companion that no Oriental could resist.

"I should like to have met the chief in a costume more befitting a man of position," said Denis, passing his hand through his thick curly hair for want of his ivory comb. "This wretched coat of

yours is so tight ! made for a slender stripling like you, I can't stir my arms for bursting the seams—it's like a straight-jacket for a madman ! I'd give something for a scarlet uniform, with epaulettes and gold lace. With my battered face, and a coat like this, I look like a ragamuffin ! ”

Walter could not help smiling at the handsome Irishman's pathetic complaint.

Denis strode up and down the narrow apartment, exclaiming against the heat and the mosquitoes, and often pausing before the hole of a window to measure with his eye the depth of the precipice below, and calculate the possibility of a descent. He always turned away disappointed, yet in a few minutes was at the aperture again. As long as enough of daylight remained, Walter occupied himself with his father's translation, amidst frequent interruptions from Denis.

“ It is growing quite dark ! ” cried the Irishman. “ This interminable day is coming at last to an end. I wonder what has become of the chief ; I thought he'd have hurried to see us at once. ”

“ He is coming now, ” observed Walter Gurney ; “ do you not hear voices approaching—yes, there are feet on the stairs. ”



CHAPTER IX.

THE AFGHAN CHIEF.

SLOW turns the grating key—the door is thrown open, and a party of Afghans enter, the foremost the chief himself. A very striking figure was that of Assad Khan, as seen by the light of torches carried by his attendants. Though not so tall as either of his captives, he looked the very type of the chief of a robber horde. Most of the Pathans had skull-caps over their wild black hair, but Assad Khan wore a magnificent turban, with a border and fringe of gold. A red Cashmere shawl fell in rich folds over the chief's broad shoulders, another was wrapt as a girdle round his waist, and in it was stuck a jewelled hilted dagger. Assad Khan was a powerful-looking man; pride was in the glance of his eye, and his step was as that of a desert lion. He surveyed his prisoners with a keen and piercing gaze.

Dermot Denis, nothing daunted, began his studied speech in the most broken Pushtoo; Assad Khan

impatiently cut him short. The Afghan turned towards the only prisoner who could understand him, and began the conversation by a series of rapid questions, which Walter answered as well as he could. Denis, with eager eyes, turned from the one speaker to the other, straining his attention to catch the meaning of what was said, and longing to put in a word.

"You say that you do not know this man's object in going to Kandahar?" asked the chief.

"He's talking of me—what does he say?" cried Denis; Walter interpreted the question, which Denis hastened to answer himself.

"Friendship—very great friendship—Kandahar big noble prince!" said the Irishman, using the few words he knew, without much regard for truth.

"The chief of Kandahar is the mortal foe of Assad Khan!" exclaimed the Afghan, striking the ground fiercely with the musket which he held in his hand.

The gesture and the savage expression on the chief's face, more than his partially understood words, showed Denis that he had made an unfortunate blunder. He was obliged to fall back on his interpreter, Walter.

"Tell him that if it be impossible for me, with his generous aid, to pursue my journey amongst the

most noble, most respectable, hospitable—don't spare your superlatives, Walter—hospitable people of this land, I would wish to return to India. I am ready to pay a ransom."

Walter explained the general purport of what his companion had said. Assad Khan replied in a haughty tone, "Tell him, that the stranger who comes unbidden into our land with secret designs, is likely to find his grave amidst our mountains. However, he being rich, may purchase my mercy." The robber named as ransom a most exorbitant sum, adding, with a stern smile, "If it be paid I'll throw your freedom into the bargain; you were of some service to a child of our race."

When Walter translated the chief's reply to Denis, the warm-tempered Irishman could not refrain from a burst of indignation at the cupidity of his captor.

"The unconscionable thief! he would ruin a Cræsus! he sells his black bread dear with a vengeance! Tell him I'm poor——"

"I cannot say that," observed Walter.

"You must meet a man on his own ground," cried Denis impatiently; "we are in the land of liars and thieves!"

"Does the Kafir agree?" asked the chief.

Walter did his best to negotiate more reasonable

terms, but Assad Khan stood firm to his offer. He knew the captives to be completely within his power, and had experience in the art of extracting gold by ill-treatment, and even torture.

"To comply with my demand is your only chance of leaving this fort alive," said Assad Khan, turning towards Denis, and making his meaning almost intelligible by his significant gestures. "Do not dream of escape. I had a Jewish merchant in this very room. He flinched from paying the ransom which I demanded ; perhaps the fox was not able to pay it. He made an attempt to get out, was caught, was flogged within an inch of his life. After awhile the madman tried the same thing again. Do you see yon hook?"—the chief pointed to the one in the wall; "I had him hanged by the neck from that hook, and that was the end of his story, as it will be of yours if you follow his example."

The Afghans who had entered the room with their chief, or stood on the ladder outside, burst into rude laughter at remembering the murder of the unfortunate Jew.

"Have you never heard what the Beloochees did with the Feringhee doctor who ventured amongst them?" pursued the chief. "Did they not believe that if they killed him, his body would be changed

into ducats? and so he was slain in his bed, and his corpse hung up for fifteen days. The Beloochees finding this was in vain, cut up the doctor's papers into little bits, and mixed them with the mortar of a house which the chief was building, in hopes that it would presently be adorned with a layer of gold.* I have more faith in getting gold from a live Feringhee than a dead one, or I might take a lesson from the Beloochees." Assad Khan laughed, and his followers echoed his laugh.

"Bid him send for paper and ink. I'll write to Calcutta for money; anything, anything to get out of this den of bloodthirsty tigers!"

Writing materials were readily produced. Denis had difficulty in tracing intelligible letters with the reed pen, and though he was a very courageous man, his hand was scarcely as steady as usual. A short note, however, was written, which the suspicious Assad Khan made Walter translate twice over before he gave it to an Afghan who was to bear it to the nearest Government official in India, who would transmit it to Calcutta.

As the chief now looked contented, and almost good-humoured, Walter took occasion to complain of the wretched food, and of the rude insolence to

* This horrible story is given as a *fact* by the traveller, General Ferrier.

which the captives had been subjected. He appealed to the chief's better feelings, in hopes that such might exist. Denis made his companion translate a request that the door which communicated with the court-yard might now be left open, but the Afghans be strictly prohibited from invading the privacy of the captives.

This trifling boon was readily accorded. Assad Khan also promised that better food should be sent. He remained for some time longer in conversation with Walter, the chief gratifying his curiosity by asking many questions regarding India and England, and trying pertinaciously to find out why the Kafirs had entered his country. He declared that they must be Government spies.

At last the long interview came to a close. The chief and his followers descended the stairs, and almost till midnight might be seen in the court-yard smoking hookahs, telling stories, and singing their wild native airs.

As soon as the last Afghan had quitted the prison, Denis gave full vent to the indignation which was boiling over in his breast, certainly not sparing his superlatives, which were by no means of a kind complimentary to the Afghans.

"I'll not pay a rupee—not a pice of the ransom to fatten these rogues!" he exclaimed. "I'm no

wretched Jew to be tortured and hanged ! I'll make my escape from these thieves ! ”

“ I fear that you will find escape impossible,” said Walter.

“ Impossible ! there's not such a word in my grammar. To men with quick brain and strong arm there's nothing impossible ! ” cried Denis. “ I shall certainly make an attempt to get off, and if the ruffians murder me, I'll just see what vengeance the English will take ! Don't you feel a thirst for revenge ? ” he asked, turning with clenched hand towards Walter.

“ The only revenge for which I thirst, is to see these fierce robbers transformed into civilised Christians,” was the young man's reply.

“ As well might tigers be transformed into lambs ! Such changes can never be ! ” exclaimed Denis.

“ Such changes *have* been, and *may* be again,” said the missionary's son. “ To One who is all-wise and all-powerful too, there is nothing impossible—even an Afghan's conversion ! ” Walter turned and gazed through the aperture on the glittering stars in the deep blue sky, and added, though not aloud, “ Such changes *will* be, though the time may be far distant, for it is written in the Word of Truth, *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* ”

CHAPTER X.

CONSCIENCE AWAKENED.

“**T**HIS is the Lord’s Day,” said Walter, with a touch of sadness in his tone as he rose on the following morning from his comfortless resting-place on the bare and dirty floor.

“Sunday, is it, only Sunday?” exclaimed Denis; “I feel as if weeks had passed since we started on our luckless expedition. If we measured time by misery, we might count the days as years! What a different Sunday this will be from those I once enjoyed!”

The same thought was passing through the mind of Walter. Each of the young men was thinking of scenes that might never again meet their eyes. Before Walter came the image of the small native church, with the little band of Christians whom his father had been the instrument of gathering from the heathen around them. In fancy, Walter heard the tinkling bell that summoned to worship; then the hymn, not very harmonious, but so heartily

sung that it warmed the listener's heart. The image of his father, pale, thin, prematurely grey, but with heaven's own peace on his face, rose before the mind's eye of the youth ; Walter could almost hear the accents, not strong, but thrilling, which told of the unspeakable bliss of the bright abode upon whose threshold he stood. Walter could not suppress a sigh.

And memory drew also a sigh, and a heavy one, from Dermot Denis. He thought of merry shooting parties over Erin's green fields, or games of billiards in his own luxurious home. Then fancy wandered to London, and he was again in Hyde Park, amongst the equestrians in Rotten Row, meeting acquaintances at every turn, bowing, laughing, making his horse curvet, with a pleasant consciousness that he himself was, perhaps, the most striking figure amongst the fashionable throng. Or there was a drive in a four-in-hand with jovial companions to feast at Richmond. Ah ! the thought of a feast to an almost famished man, who had nothing but black bread to eat ! For Assád Khan had either forgotten his promise to send better food, or had deliberately broken it, choosing to keep down the strength and spirit of his captives by bringing them to a state of semi-starvation. This was all the more irritating as there were no signs of scarcity

in the court-yard which the prisoners' room overlooked.

An hour after rising, Walter seated himself, Oriental fashion, directly in front of the open door. His appearance called forth a few insults and jests from the Afghans below, and fragments of melon-rind were thrown at his head; but, restrained by the orders of the chief, no one dared to set a foot on the ladder. Insult was also changed to sudden silence when the prisoner began to chant verses aloud, to the wild, monotonous air of an Indian *bhajan*. Walter's voice was a very fine one, and the sound drew immediate attention. The woman at her wheel, the *bihisté** drawing water, the warrior burnishing his weapon or smoking his hookah, listened to the Feringhee minstrel; the very children left their play to cluster around the foot of the ladder. When, after about ten minutes, the singer paused, a clamour arose of "Go on!"

"He's a strange fellow who sings when others would curse or groan," said one of the wild denizens of the mountains. "The Feringhee may be shot or hanged to-morrow, but he sings like one at a wedding-feast."

Walter took care not to weary his audience; at

* Water-carrier.

the first signs of restlessness amongst his hearers, he rose and retired from their view.

"I say, Walter, what was that extraordinary chant with which, like a second Orpheus, you were taming the beasts?" asked Denis.

"I was chanting part of my father's Pushtoo translation."

"You don't mean to say that you were repeating anything from the Bible to those savage, blood-thirsty, Mohammedan bigots?"

"I commenced with what never provokes even a Moslem," replied the missionary's son; "I gave the Afghans part of the Sermon on the Mount."

"And are you insane enough to imagine that it has done, or could do good to any one here?" asked Denis.

"It has done good to myself," was the quiet reply.

"How—what do you mean?" inquired Denis.

"I repeated to others a lesson which I need to take home to my own heart,—*Love your enemies.*"

"I will never love nor forgive an Afghan," exclaimed Denis, and he finished the sentence with a muttered curse.

"God helping me, I will," thought Walter. He had found that one of the greatest aids to obeying the Saviour's difficult command, is to try to *do good*

to them that hate you. The youth had that day made his first attempt to shed a gleam of Gospel light upon his cruel oppressors. It cast a glorious radiance upon Walter's own soul,—the pillar which rested over his prison was indeed a pillar of light.

A little later in the day Walter resumed his singing. This time the story of Zaccheus was his theme. Denis stood close by to amuse himself in his dreary bondage by watching the various expressions on the upturned faces below.

"Look there, Walter! there's a beauty, a perfect little *houri*!"* exclaimed Dermot Denis suddenly, as he caught sight of a child about eight years of age, who, attracted by the music, had come down by some unseen staircase which led to the upper apartments occupied by the family of the chief. The girl was leaning against one of the pillars, half in the shadow of a recess.

"It is Sultána!" cried Walter, who had just finished his chant. The child caught his eye and bounded forward, her face beaming with pleasure at the sight of her Feringhee preserver.

"Ah! here comes good fortune in the shape of an Afghan fairy!" ejaculated Denis. Determined to make the most of it, the Irishman pressed forward

* Houris are the beautiful beings who are supposed to wait on believers in Paradise.

in his eagerness to gain the child's attention, half pushing his companion aside that he himself might occupy the foremost place. "Hungry, big hungry," cried Denis, in his imperfect Pushtoo. He pointed to his own mouth, then pointing to his friend, indicated that Walter also was suffering privation. Denis could think of no other Pushtoo at the moment but "kill sheep;" but it seemed to him to express what he desired to say like a telegraphic message.

Sultána's smile showed that she understood the tall stranger. She only said, however, "I will bring something, but not now; I cannot stay, I am wanted," and she vanished into the dark recess from which she had just emerged.

But it was as if in these few minutes the fairy had scattered a whole shower of blossoms over the path of the sanguine and volatile Denis. The love of romance, which was strong in him, was gratified, and his excessively sanguine spirit built an airy fabric of hope on the smile of a child. Sultána would aid his escape, he knew it; he would win the little one's heart,—it was a pity that she was only a child. Denis had unbounded confidence in his own powers of persuasion if only he were able to speak; but who could plead effectually with a vocabulary so limited as his! For hours Denis did noth-

ing but ask Walter to translate words and sentences into Pushtoo. The Irishman learnt eagerly and with rapidity, his anxiety to speak quickening his apprehension, and strengthening a memory naturally good. Denis was proud of his own progress, and impatient to make use of his new acquisitions. Why did not Sultána return? Was she, the beautiful child, also a faithless, ungrateful Afghan!

About sunset a furious squabble arose between two Afghans outside the fort, who were evidently likely to come to blows. The outer gate being not yet locked, as it invariably was at night, most of the inhabitants of the Eagle's Nest thronged out to see the *tamasha*. The court-yard was clear, save of a few old women, and children too young even to enjoy the sight of a fray. As if seizing her opportunity, from a different recess from that in which she had at first disappeared, came forth little Sultána, her speed only checked by the necessity of carrying something with care. She climbed the ladder with the agility of a cat, not needing to make use of her hands. Wrapt up in what Denis recognised as a silk handkerchief of his own, was something which the child eagerly placed in the hands of Walter. "It is good, eat it—and quickly," said the girl.

The handkerchief contained a large portion of a

delicate kid, cooked to perfection on hot stones placed in a hole, a fashion of Afghan cooking which was quite new to Denis. The captives, it need not be said, had no knives or forks, dishes or plates ; but to men who had starved for two days on black bread, no accessories were needed. Sultána stood by, smiling to see how the meal was enjoyed. Denis was too busily engaged in eating even to make use of his newly-acquired sentences in Pushtoo. His appetite was worthy of an Afghan.

"Do you know how I got that for you ?" asked Sultána of Walter, who was the first to end his repast.

"You coaxed your father to send it."

"No, my father would send nothing," said the child, "though I begged him until he was angry. I will tell you how I got it," she went on, in a low confidential tone. "Mir Ghazan was baking his kid, but I determined that some one else should eat it. So I ran up to him, and said, 'Oh ! Mir Ghazan, I saw just now a fine cheetah outside the fort; I think it's hid in the jungle; if you're quick you may shoot it !' for I knew that he wanted a cheetah's skin; he told me so a few days ago. Up jumped Mir Ghazan," continued the girl, mirth dancing in her blue eyes ; "he seized his gun, and off he went, and I ran away with the kid."

"O Sultána ! if I had known this, I would not

have eaten the kid," said Walter, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"Why, didn't you want food?" said the little Afghan.

"Do you remember, dear Sultána, that when we were in the jungle together I taught you that *God is love*?"

"Yes, and you taught me to pray, 'Allah! teach me to know Thee. Allah! teach me to love Thee.' I've done it too," said the child.

"God is not only loving, but He is holy, most holy, Sultána, and those who know Him and love Him He always makes holy also. God has forbidden us to lie and to steal."

"Do you never lie or steal?" asked the girl, in surprise.

"I try not to disobey the great God's commands, and He helps me, for I ask Him for help," said Walter. "Sultána, without God's aid we can do nothing but sin."

The idea of sin was a new one to the little Afghan. "What is sin?" she said, inquiringly.

"Disobeying the commands of a holy God. Shall I tell you, my child, how sin and sorrow and death first came into this beautiful world? It was by one lie, that of Satan; one taking of forbidden fruit by a woman."

Sultána seated herself at the Englishman's feet to listen, and with earnest attention heard the story of the Fall.

"And now, Sultána, do you remember the song which I was singing, about the Holy Teacher who came to the house of a man who was a great sinner."

"I heard the song," said Sultána.

"The Master forgave the man's sin, and loved him; but did the man then remain a thief and a liar, as it seems likely that he had been before?"

A troubled expression came over the lovely face of the child. When conscience is for the first time awakened, does it not usually awake with a pang? Sultána gave no direct reply; she only said with a sigh, "If your great Pir (holy man) were to come to the Afghans, and bid them not lie and loot, I think that they would kill him."

"The Jews *did* kill our great Master," said Walter; "I will tell you that story another time, Sultána."



CHAPTER XI.

REPENTANCE AND REPARATION.

IN the meantime Denis had finished his very ample repast. "Better take enough for three days," he thought; "for who knows when I may have such another dinner again!" He then took the well-picked bones, and threw them out of the hole which served as a window. Denis had a shrewd idea that Sultána had not come quite lawfully by her prize, though he understood very little of the conversation passing between her and his friend.

The Irishman had no intention of letting Walter monopolise the attention of the pretty little Afghan; he had resolved to win the child's heart. Denis was indeed aware that he did not appear to advantage in his present deplorable guise; his hair matted, tangled, and stained, and his face marred with scratches and bruises. Walter's threadbare coat had split in more than one place, and the remaining part of Denis's dress was so ragged and

soiled, that it afforded no temptation even to an Afghan spoiler. Denis would not have chosen to be seen thus in Bond Street, but in a robber's fort in Afghanistan deficiencies would be less noticed.

"The real gentleman shines forth in any costume," thought the Irishman; "if I can trust less to my appearance, I must trust more to my wits." Then, recalling to memory his well-conned speech, Denis thus addressed the Afghan child.

"Come, speak me, Sultána, houri! pearl of garden! rose of sea!" It is not to be wondered at if the orator made a few blunders in airing his newly-acquired Pushtoo.

The child surveyed him with an expression of mingled curiosity and doubt. She listened, but did not move from her place by Walter.

Denis, considering the extreme poverty of his materials, made a marvellous display of eloquence, aiding his halting tongue by expressive signs. "I, prince—great prince" (he pointed to himself), "Sultána, beautiful" (and again came the string of flattering epithets learned by heart). "Sultána, help—prince—get away—prince send elephant—English—silver howdah—big gold—Sultána, houri, much glad."

"Is *he* a prince?" looking up inquiringly at her first European friend.

"Not shahzáda (prince) but gentleman," replied Walter, giving his comrade the title in Pushtoo which would most truthfully describe his position in life.

"Has he an English elephant with silver howdah?" asked Sultána.

"Not that—but gold to buy one," was the hesitating reply.

"Come, houri, pearl of garden," resumed Denis in his most insinuating tone.

"I will not come, you tell lies!" said the child; and with this brief and startling rebuke she quitted the room.

A woeful sight met Sultána, as with light step she descended the ladder. The two men whose quarrel had given her an opportunity of carrying the stolen food to the captives, after for half-an-hour bandying fierce words and blows, had at last taken to their knives—no uncommon way of settling a dispute in the Eagle's Nest. The result was that both were now carried through the gateway into the fort, groaning and bleeding. The sight of wounds was too common to shock the little Afghan on ordinary occasions; but now in the sufferers she recognised Mir Ghazan and Ali Khan. The latter was a favourite with Sultána, as the youth had, in boyhood, often carried his lovely little cousin in

his arms, and made a playmate of the beautiful child.

"Oh, Mir Ghazan, you wolf! why did you stab him?" exclaimed Sultána.

"He stole my kid!" cried Mir Ghazan.

"I did not!" was the angry denial; the war which had been carried on with knives, was prolonged in fierce words, mingled with groans.

"He did not—it was I who stole your kid!" exclaimed Sultána; "I was like Eve,—the harm comes from me, and if they die, I have killed them!" The hot tears which filled and brimmed over the little girl's eyes were tears of repentance. For the first time in her life the Afghan felt conviction of sin, the sin of breaking a commandment of God and incurring His wrath. Not an hour before Sultána had been utterly ignorant of its nature, but what Walter had written on a child's heart now seemed to flash forth in letters of fire. Sultána saw in the wounds, and heard in the groans, the result of sin—*her own sin!*

This recognition of sin and its nature may seem but the alphabet in spiritual knowledge; but, alas! how many called Christians have never learnt it! A vague acknowledgment that all are sinners, is very different indeed from the heart's confession, *I have sinned!* Where repentance has never been known,

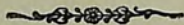
oh how weak is faith and how cold is love! The sense of sin makes faith look up to a Saviour; the joy of receiving pardon makes love pour forth her rich offering of self-sacrifice at His feet. They love much who truly feel that they have been forgiven much.

And another lesson had also been learnt by the quick pupil, the intelligent Afghan child. With the bright drops flowing down her cheeks, Sultána ran up to the wounded men who had been laid on charpais in the court-yard, ready for the rough surgery of the barber. The girl stripped the silver bracelets from her slender wrists, and silently laid them beside the bleeding forms of Mir Ghazan and Ali Khan. Then slowly, and sadly Sultána returned to the zenana apartments above to receive the chastisement which she expected—not so much for her mischievous exploit, as for giving away her jewels. The poor child had only the comfort of knowing that she had done what she could in the way of reparation, and had done it at once.

Dermot Denis was somewhat mortified and ruffled at the result of his interview with Sultána. She was but a pretty, ignorant savage after all, he said, and was probably not to be trusted. He would rather, he averred, depend for means of escape on his own courage and skill. But how even


his powers could effect his purpose was a difficult problem to solve. The outer gate was invariably secured at night, and would form an impassable barrier. The court-yard was never quite empty ; or if for a few minutes it appeared to be so, who could tell how many eyes were looking forth from the recesses beyond the pillars or the trellis-covered apertures which probably lighted the zenana? Thus on the court-yard side there was clearly scarcely the faintest chance of escape. On the opposite side, where the aperture served as a window, the precipice seemed to preclude all hope ; unless, indeed, a rope could be procured long enough, and strong enough to support a man of some weight as far as a clump of brushwood, from which, if active, he might possibly clamber down to more level ground. How could Denis contrive to procure such a rope? He had in the morning made an attempt to sound Ali Khan on the subject, having learnt from Walter the Pushtoo word for a rope, but the young Afghan either could not or would not understand him. Ali Khan had probably too much regard for his own neck to hazard it by aiding the prisoner's plans ; and even had such not been the case, his present wounded condition precluded his giving the slightest assistance.

Denis lay awake till past midnight plotting and planning, resolved to escape in time to stop the sending of the immense sum of money required by Assad Khan for his ransom. The young Irishman fell at length into a sleep prolonged for hours after sunrise, and so profound that it was not broken by sounds which must have startled from slumber almost anyone but himself. Denis was so accustomed to rude noises from the court-yard, that the wildest uproar would scarcely have roused him. What the sounds were will be told in the following chapter.



CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUR OF PERIL.

T daybreak there was an arrival in the Eagle's Nest. The great gate was opened earlier than usual to admit a travelling *Moulvie*.*

Walter, who was as usual an early riser, witnessed the entrance of the holy man, who was received with respect. The Englishman soon saw the effect of the presence of a religious teacher in the place, one who had the prestige of a Hajji.† The Afghans in the fort had been exceedingly lax in the performance of the outward forms of their religion; their only worship had appeared to be that of gold. There had been no apparent reading of the Koran; no Muezzin had sounded the call to prayer. But now, as Walter looked down on the court-yard, he saw prayer-carpets spread, and the Moulvie, with his face turned towards Mecca, going through the formal ceremonials which Mohammedanism prescribes. He

* Religious instructor.

† One who has performed a pilgrimage to Mecca.

was now on his knees, anon with his forehead touching the ground, then rising and bowing the orthodox number of times, whilst some Afghans behind him imitated the Moulvie's movements, and repeated after him that which was rather an enumeration of divine attributes than what we should recognise as anything like prayer. The whole ceremony was almost like a drill exercise, and had as little of true devotion in it as the movements of soldiers on parade. And yet these sons of Islam looked upon it as a means of compounding for their sins ; the unscrupulous robber, the red-handed murderer, was yet a "true believer," and looked upon paradise as the reward of his cold and heartless observance of forms.

The devotions, such as they were, being ended, and the carpets removed, the Moulvie retired into one of the recesses, out of view of Walter, probably to partake of Afghan hospitality. Almost in front of the prison of the Europeans were the charpais on which were stretched the two Afghans wounded on the preceding evening, Mir Ghazan and Ali Khan. The former was asleep ; the latter raised his languid eyes towards the Englishman, for whom he had formed a liking, and answered with courtesy Walter's inquiries as to how he had passed the night. It appeared evident that the youth's wound, though painful, was of no dangerous nature. Ali Khan had

pecially enjoyed the singing of Walter, and now he feebly asked the captive to sing again. Walter complied at once, choosing a parable as his theme.

The unusual sound brought the Moulvie out of his dark retreat. He was a man of repulsive appearance, with dark stern face, on whose every lineament seemed to be written bigotry and pride.

"Who is this dog of a Kafir," he cried, "who dares to lift up his voice in the hearing of true believers! Who knows with what venom he is poisoning the ears of the faithful! Let him become a follower of the true Prophet, or die the death of a dog! He should be given but the choice between Islam and the edge of the sword."

His loud angry call drew around the Moulvie a band of Afghans, who looked up towards Walter with threatening eyes, and hands grasping the hilts of their daggers.

"I know the blasphemies of these Kafirs," continued the Moulvie; "I know what is written in that book which they dare to call the Word of God."

"And which Mohammed Sahib himself acknowledged to be such," said Walter. "I, too, have read the Koran."

"Dost dare to answer me, O son of a dog!

devourer of the unclean beast!" exclaimed the Moulvie, and he began to pour out a volley of imprecations which could but have the object of stirring up the ignorant fanatics around him to some deed of violence.

Perhaps there is no being upon earth to whose heart the life blood would not "thrill with sudden start" when facing almost immediate death by the hands of his fellow-creatures. Walter saw his enemy's object, and felt that his own life hung on a thread. There was an instinct to retreat back as far as he could, though but into a room whose door he could not close, as it opened from without; but a thought of Denis flashed across the prisoner's mind. Should he draw down the lightning on his friend; need there be two murders instead of one? No; instead of retreating, Walter advanced a step, so that his foot was on the first round of the ladder; he then closed the door, and set his back firmly against it, earnestly praying that the sounds which must follow might not bring Denis forth to witness and to share the terrible fate before his companion. The Englishman's face was very pale, but he blenched not.

The Moulvie also advanced a step. He raised his clenched fist, and exclaimed: "I will expose thy detestable blasphemies, and convict thee out of thine

own mouth. Whom dost thou say that Isa (Jesus) the Son of Mary was?"

"The Saviour—my Saviour!" replied Walter.

"That is no answer!" cried the Moulvie, with fierce eagerness to draw his victim to utter the word which of all others most rouses the bigotry of the Moslem. "Tell me but this,—had He a Father?"

"Yes."

"And who was that Father?—whose Son was your Prophet Isa?"

"*He that confesses Me before men, him will I also confess before the angels of heaven!*" thought Walter, feeling as if a train of gunpowder were beneath him, and that he was himself called to apply the match.

"Whose Son was He?" repeated the Moulvie.

"The Son of God," replied Walter, with distinct voice, though a quivering lip.

"Down with him! kill him! slay the blasphemer!" cried the Moulvie; "the path to paradise is over the corpses of Kafirs!"

There was a rush up the ladder staircase, daggers flashed in the sunlight. The assailants, on so narrow a way, cumbered each other's movements; Walter felt himself struck, but the attempt of the man behind the foremost ruffian to get in front

by pushing past him partly diverted the blow, and instead of receiving a mortal wound, Walter, in the scuffle, was thrown with violence off the ladder into the court-yard below !

It was like falling amongst a herd of yelling wolves, who would soon have finished their terrible work, had not at the moment the loud angry voice of the Afghan chief arrested his followers. With naked weapon in his hand, and wrath flashing from his eyes, Assad Khan strode into the midst of the throng.

“Back, madmen !” he exclaimed. “Would you dare to slay the prisoner whom I please to protect, and rob me of a ransom that will make me the wealthiest chief in the land of the Afghans !”

The would-be murderers shrank back, ashamed not of their guilt, but their folly.

“We want no fire-brands here !” continued the haughty chief, turning towards the discomfited Moulvie. “Go on your journey, and at once. We can find our way to paradise well enough without the aid of such teaching as yours.”

Walter lay on the ground in violent pain, not so much from his wounded shoulder as from his ankle, which had been severely sprained by the fall. While the chief was angrily repeating his orders for the summary dismissal of the Moulvie, who was

violently expostulating, and threatening Assad Khan with the displeasure of all the *Pirs* whose tombs the Hajji had visited, two little hands were placed on Walter's arm, and a trembling voice exclaimed :

"Oh, have they killed my Feringhee friend !"

"No, dear child, it is merely that my ankle is sprained. The shoulder is nothing—a mere flesh-cut," said Walter ; he bit his lip to keep down the expression of pain.

"It was I who brought my father," whispered Sultána. "I had come down with milk for poor Ali Khan, and I saw that bad Moulvie in such a fury, and I guessed what was going to happen, so I ran up the stair to bring help."

"You saved my life, Sultána."

The child's face brightened with keen delight. "Do you think that the great Allah sent me to save you," she asked, "as He sent you to save me from the cheetah that was carrying me off !"

"I have not a doubt that He sent you."

"I did not hear Him," said Sultána ; "but as I ran I asked Him to make me run fast, and it was as if He gave me wings, and I flew,—I flew !" The child spoke with eager excitement ; then softening her tone she added, "I won't forget to thank Him this time."

"Heaven's blessing on you, darling!" exclaimed Walter, his whole soul going with his words.

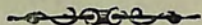
"Why was the Moulvie so savage?" asked Sultána; "what did he want you to do?"

"To deny my Saviour, the Lord Jesus! It was better to die than do that."

"Do you love Him so much!" said the child.

"Better than life," was the reply.

"Will you tell me all about Him?" whispered the little Afghan; "perhaps you may teach me to love Him too."



CHAPTER XIII.

A DARING ATTEMPT.

IT may have been simple caprice, or even the spirit of contradiction, or possibly a more generous emotion roused by the sight of wrong done to one who had rescued his child, that made Assad Khan now treat his wounded captive with something like kindness. Whatever was the cause of the chief's conduct, Walter benefited by the change. He was raised from the ground and placed on a charpai. The old barber, who in the fort acted the part of a surgeon, which he did with skill acquired by much practice, dressed the wound in the shoulder, bound up the ankle, and applied a lotion of herbs to reduce the swelling which had already begun. A brass vessel filled with milk, and an abundance of delicious fruit, were brought for the suffering youth; and with a consideration which surprised him, some of the contents of his own plundered carpet-bag, which afforded Walter the relief of a change of clothes. Assad Khan asked

his captive whether he preferred remaining below, or being carried up to the room which he had occupied with the other Feringhee. Walter unhesitatingly chose to return to Denis. By the chief's order he was carried up on the charpai, and over him Assad Khan threw a large and handsome wrap, something between a rug and a blanket, acquired—we need not inquire how.

Denis, who had watched the latter part of the proceedings from the top of the stair, was really distressed at the sight of his injured friend. Walter was gratified at beholding his companion's unfeigned sorrow, for he saw unbidden tears rising to the Irishman's eyes. But when the Afghans who had carried up the wounded captive had quitted the room, and the prisoners were left to themselves, the deepest source of Denis's trouble became apparent.

"The most unlucky thing that could have happened!" he cried. "You are lamed for ever so long. I know what a sprain is, for I had one when my horse came down in leaping a ditch. It's worse than breaking a bone. You won't be able for weeks to do more than hop round the room?"

"Not a very wide circle to hop round," observed Walter with a smile.

"No joking matter!" cried Denis impatiently. "How can you make your escape with me if you are utterly lame?"

"Lame or not, I see no way of either of us making our escape," observed Walter.

"But I do—at least I will. Do you think that I am going to wait here like Patience on a monument grinning at Afghans, till a ransom is paid that would make me a beggar?"

Walter was too weary to reply. He felt utterly exhausted by the effects of his fall. The youth fell into a deep sleep which lasted for hours, and awoke, though still in pain, greatly revived and refreshed.

During the sleep of his comrade, how busy had been the thoughts of Dermot Denis, what a struggle had been going on in his mind! Denis was not much given to thinking, except in the way of building castles in the air, or forming ingenious schemes for accomplishing some plan which he had taken into his head. Almost new to him was the exercise of considering whether what he wished to do were right or wrong; but his judgment was forced on that exercise now. Denis had two courses open before him, and the one on which his heart was set would involve an action which his better nature knew to be base—desertion of the faithful

and generous friend whom he himself, by his folly and self-will, had drawn into danger.

"Walter is evidently a favourite here; no one would injure him," said Denis to himself, as he strode up and down the narrow space of his prison. "To remain beside him would do him no good. Were I once in India I could take effectual means for his rescue. It is better for him that I should fly."

Thus, by arguing with himself, Denis tried to drown the inward voice of honour—it could scarcely be called conscience—that told him that it would be cruel and base to leave Walter to the fury of savages baulked of their golden prize, and that it was selfishness that prompted the wish to do so. Denis's most effectual argument was the strength of his own desire. What world-wide fame he would acquire by accomplishing so daring a feat as escaping from a den of robbers! What a book of thrilling adventures he would write, which would not only be eagerly read in Britain, Ireland, and India, but would be translated into foreign tongues. The title of "Afghanistan Denis," the traveller who made the wonderful escape from the Eagle's Nest, would be more gratifying to his pride than could be the ribbon of the Bath. Thus reflected Denis, and he had succeeded in almost persuading himself that black was white, before Walter awoke from his sleep.

"How are you, old boy?" inquired Denis.

"Better, very much better. I cannot be too thankful to Him who has brought good out of evil. Denis, I feel such a hope——" Walter paused, for he was conscious that he was speaking to one who had no sympathy with any such hope.

"What is it?" inquired the Irishman; "I thought that you always left the hoping to me."

"I hope that I have been led here to do some good to these wild Afghans, and specially to that most interesting child Sultána."

"Do you mean that you have been self-appointed to act as a kind of honorary missionary in the Eagle's Nest—a shepherd—or rather a wolf-herd to a gang of Afghan robbers?"

"God can make use of the weakest instruments," said Walter, rather speaking to himself than to Denis. "It was certainly a mysterious Providence that led me here." Walter was thinking of the fiery cloudy pillar which he had prayerfully sought to follow.

"If any one can do good here, you will," said Denis; "the ruffians seem to be amazingly fond of your singing; you have certainly a capital voice. Do you think you could give the Afghans a little of your chanting now?"

Walter was surprised at such a proposal coming

from Denis. He himself felt little equal to any bodily effort; but his voice was the one talent left to Walter in his prison, and he desired to use it to the uttermost for his Master. The young man let Denis draw his charpai to a position in front of the open door, so that Walter, by raising himself to a sitting posture, commanded a view of the court-yard, and looked directly down on the two wounded men. Ali Khan's expression of pleasure at seeing him, rewarded Walter for the little effort which he had made.

"Leave your blanket with me," said Dermot Denis. "The afternoon is so hot, you cannot possibly want it." Scarcely waiting for a word of consent, Denis carried off the wrap to a corner of the room which was quite out of view of the court-yard.

Walter's conduct on the late trying occasion had made a favourable impression on some of the Afghans. He was regarded as a gallant youth, who had scorned to deny his faith, even with a dagger at his throat. Whether that faith were true or false was a matter of utter indifference to many of the dwellers in the fort; they knew that Assad Khan had called the Moulvie—whatever in Pushtoo is equivalent to a humbug—and had turned him out of the place; what were they that they should dispute the judgment of their chief? Thus Walter

began his singing under more favourable auspices than before, and had a larger circle of listeners. The prisoner not only chanted the account of the Prodigal Son, but was able to give a simple practical exposition of that story which perhaps, of all the Lord's parables, goes most directly to the listener's heart. Pain and weariness were forgotten; Walter was full of animation; he felt that he was giving the message of salvation to those who now heard for the first time that there is a Father in Heaven, ready to welcome His prodigals home.

Young Gurney sang and spoke for more than an hour; indeed, as long as his strength would hold out. An Afghan then came up the stair with a meal, which was a better one than Assad Khan had ever before sent to his captives.

"Take it from his hands—don't let the fellow come in!" cried Denis from his corner. "Tell him to close the door; we've had enough of the Afghans for this day at least."

Walter translated the request into Pushtoo; the food was placed on the charpai, and the door closed, but not locked. Walter turned to see why Denis delayed coming to share the dinner, and beheld with surprise the occupation in which his comrade was engaged.

Denis had that morning discovered a penknife in

the pocket of Walter's coat, which he wore. It was to the Irishman a prize of priceless value. That penknife, with patient toil, he had been plying during the whole of the time that Walter had been engaged in missionary work.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed the astonished Walter; "cutting my—or rather the chief's blanket into strips!"

"Hist! I am preparing a rope."

"You are not dreaming of attempting the descent!"

"Not dreaming, but resolving and preparing," replied Denis, too much engaged—perhaps too much ashamed—to lift up his eyes.

Walter was deeply wounded, far more than he cared to show. He had already had reason to know that the former hero of his fancy was a far less noble being than he had believed him to be; he saw that Denis was thoughtless and selfish; but Walter would have indignantly repudiated the idea of his fellow-captive being able thus to desert a helpless, suffering friend, had he heard it from any lips but the Irishman's own. "*Put not your trust in princes, or in any child of men,*" thought Walter. "I would not, for all the gold of the Indies, have left *him* to bear the consequences of any flight of mine from this place."

"Don't wait dinner for me!" cried Denis; "I can find my way to my mouth by starlight, but cannot spare one second of daylight for my work, for one strip carelessly cut might cost me a broken neck."

"Will your rope be long enough?" asked Walter curtly.

"Thirty-six strips, each six feet long; that will reach some way down, even allowing for the knots," replied Denis.

"Can you trust your knots?"

"Most perfectly; I am famous for knots, I make them tighter than even those of wedlock."

A long pause of silence followed. It was broken by the impatient Denis.

"I say, Walter, don't dawdle so over your food; eat fast, and have done with it. I could get on twice as rapidly if you held the cloth whilst I cut it. The sun has almost set."

Walter did not refuse his help. Somewhat gloomily and silently he assisted the Irishman at his work. Denis laboured energetically; the strips were all divided at last, just as it became too dark to direct the knife.

Then came the tying of the knots. Denis strained them with all his might to be sure that they would not slip. Such work could be done in

semi-darkness. It was by feeling, not by sight, that the rope was fastened to the iron hook in the wall, and first the end, then the remaining length let down through the window. During the last hour scarcely a word had been spoken.

"Denis, if you make your way down in safety, how will you find any path to the road?"

"Trust an Irishman for finding his way; it's an instinct," was the reply.

"Will your strength suffice for the journey on foot? You are likely to be pursued."

"Not till morning, at least," said Denis; "and to-morrow I shall be safe in India. I have strength enough for anything short of carrying off this fort on my shoulders. I have, ere now, walked fifty miles for a wager, and on the second day of our journey, thanks to that limping mule, we did not go far. But I'll prepare myself for my long trudge by a hurried meal ere I start."

Denis ate with feverish haste the food which he could not see. His dinner was despatched in three minutes. What remained he thrust into his pocket. "Now, I'm ready to be off!" he exclaimed; "hurrah for freedom and home!"

"Dermot," said Walter, earnestly, "we are about to part, probably never again to meet in this world. You are bound on a most dangerous journey, and

I——” he cared not to finish the sentence. “Let us once more kneel down together, and commend ourselves, soul and body, to the care of a merciful God.”

“Oh, I’ve no time for prayer!” cried Denis, impatiently; “you pray enough for us both. Now for a start! The first step is what puzzles me most—how to get through yon hole, seeing that my feet must go first, for I must not descend head downwards. But where there’s a will there’s a way!”

To facilitate his climb to the window, Denis dragged the charpai beneath it; but even when raised upon this, he could not bring his feet to the required elevation, though clinging to the rope to help him. The unexpected mechanical difficulty irritated the impetuous young man.

“Walter, I must climb on your shoulder.”

“Perhaps you will remember that I am wounded,” said Walter, coldly.

“Of course I don’t mean your wounded shoulder; just stand up. Oh, I forget you are lame—how very provoking! Still you can give me some help.”

At the cost of much suffering, the help was given; without it, notwithstanding his agility, and the desperate efforts which he made, Denis could not have accomplished his purpose. With one

foot planted on the unwounded shoulder, maintaining his balance by means of the rope, Denis contrived to protrude the other foot through the hole. To make the first follow it was a feat painfully hard to accomplish, and every unsuccessful attempt caused actual agony to Walter. At length the long limbs of Denis were in outer air. But another annoyance was to be encountered. The width of the aperture hardly admitted the passage of shoulders so broad as those of the young Irishman. Denis pushed, struggled, gasped and groaned, sorely grazing his skin against the rough sides of the hole. Most terrible indeed would be his fate if he remained fixed as in a vice, his head and shoulders within the prison, his feet dangling helplessly in the air. For some minutes—terrible minutes—Denis was utterly unable to get in or out. The drops burst forth on his brow, as much from the dread that he would not be able to force his way through, as from the frantic efforts which he made to do so. At last—at last through the hole which had been so completely blocked up by the form of Denis as to leave the room in utter darkness, Walter could see the stars once more. There was a head still visible, then hands clinging to the knotted line; then they too disappeared—Dermot Denis was free!

Walter listened with breathless attention for any

sound from below. He heard but the screech of the owl pursuing his nightly flight; even that familiar sound made him start. Then surely there was something like a crash on the brushwood low down. Had Denis reached the bottom of the descent? Walter had no means of judging by sight, but he got hold of the rope not far from the hook, and by pulling it ascertained that it was hanging loose, not strained tight by the weight of a man. Dermot must either have climbed down or have fallen,—which?

“Better unloose the knot now, and throw down the rope after him, that no clue remain as to how he made his escape,” thought Walter.

He could not unloose the knot, but groped in the dark for the penknife. Walter’s sprained ankle made every movement painful. The penknife was found at last, left open on the floor by Denis. Walter, standing on the charpai, cut the knot which he could not untie, and the end of the rope which had been fastened to it was drawn through the hole by the weight of the rest.

Walter could now do no more but prepare his soul by prayer, and his body by rest, for whatever the morrow might bring. He was engaged in fervent devotion, when a rude tramping on the stair and the sound of voices broke the stillness of mid-

night. The door was roughly thrown open. At the hour when he was least expected, Assad Khan, attended by men bearing torches, and one small form gliding noiselessly behind, entered the prisoners' room.



CHAPTER XIV.

SPEAK OR DIE!

IT is necessary to explain the cause of Assad Khan's most unexpected appearance.

The chief was holding late revels that night, to celebrate some relative's betrothal, when a loud and continued call at the gate announced that some one wanted admittance. The great iron key hung at the girdle of Assad Khan, for he never at night trusted it into any hands but his own. Such precaution was deemed necessary in that land of treachery and sudden surprises. Followed by those who had been sharing his banquet, Assad Khan stalked to the massive gate. The call for admittance had excited the curiosity of the females of his family, who, in their upper apartments, were having a feast of their own. Sultána, to whom childhood gave freedom of action, came down to behold and report.

The gate was not unclosed till it was ascertained that he who claimed admittance was Attili Ullah, a

trusted servant of the chief, who had been chosen as his messenger to convey the letter of Dermot Denis to the official in India.

On being admitted, the Afghan fell at the feet of Assad Khan, and told his story. He spun it out to some length, with a great many appeals to the Holy Being whose name is so lightly taken by Moslems. But the story itself may be given in very few words. In fording a river Attili's foot had slipped, he had been well-nigh drowned, and the precious letter which was to have brought such heaps of rupees had been lost !

Assad Khan was angry, and the poor messenger narrowly escaped a flogging as well as drowning. Assad Khan thought, however, that the delay of a few days was all the harm that had been done. If the yellow-haired one, as he called the Irishman, had written one letter, he was at hand to write another, and a second messenger should start with it at once. It was this that brought to the prison at midnight the unwelcome visitors who now thronged it.

"Where is he ? Where is the yellow-haired ?" exclaimed Assad Khan, gazing around in surprise at finding only Walter within.

"Where is he ?" echoed the wondering attendants.

Walter had resolved to answer no questions. Every minute's delay was, he felt, important, as giving to Dermot Denis a better chance of escape.

"Where is the Kafir dog?" exclaimed the furious chief, when no doubt remained that the prisoner had vanished indeed.

Not a word from the lips of Walter.

"Who saw him last?" roared out the chief; "who brought the food which I sent more early than usual?"

"I took it," answered an Afghan.

"Was the yellow-haired here? Did you see him?"

"I did not see him, for he," pointing to Walter, "took the food from my hand, and I did not enter the room."

Several voices spoke at once; they bore witness that the yellow-haired had been in the room when Walter was carried in on the charpai; but nothing had been seen of him since.

"Then it may have been many hours since he passed through the court-yard; and he could not pass without being seen!" exclaimed the indignant chief. "Ali Khan and Mir Ghazan at least must have seen him. If there has been treachery,—if the Feringhee has bribed with his gold,—the vengeance of Assad shall fall on the traitors." Then suddenly turning again towards Walter, he cried, "You must

know how and when he fled. Dog, speak ! or I'll force out the secret by torture !”

Walter pressed his white lips closely together ; not a sound came forth.

“ Bind him and bastinado him, till he speak or die !”

The state of Walter's ankle, so inflamed that even a touch gave pain, made the command most barbarous ; every blow on that foot would be torture indeed. The unhappy youth could but inwardly pray that strength might be given to bear what he felt that unaided human nature could not endure. But no compassion for the sufferer was heard in any Afghan heart there—but one. Sultána did not weep, nor cling to her father's knees ; child as she was, she knew that to do so would be of no avail whatever—she might as well try by tears to melt a stone ; like a young fawn she bounded forward—one little bare foot just touching the charpai gave impetus to her spring. Sultána was in the window aperture in a moment, and cried out in a tone of defiance—“ If you touch him, I'll throw myself over the cliff.”

“ Sultána, come down !” cried her father ; “ I *will* wring the secret out of the Kafir !”

“ But if *I* can tell it ?”—and what a bright face,

bending down from the aperture, was seen by the torchlight! "what if the little Eagle knows how the yellow-haired fled!"

"Thou! speak, child!" cried the chief, in surprise.

"You will not hurt my friend if I tell all?"

"I have no wish to hurt *him*," was the reply, "if I can but get back again into my grasp the wealthy Feringhee. This youth is poor as a wandering fakir."

The yellow-haired fled this way—by this opening," cried Sultána; "he must have had an eagle's wings, indeed, if he got to the bottom unharmed."

"How knowest thou that he escaped by the window?"

"He left a bit of his coat behind on this stone!" cried the intelligent child, triumphantly exhibiting a fragment of the garment which Denis had torn in his struggle to get through the hole, and which her hand had accidentally touched.

"After him, and seize him!" cried the chief.

There needed no second command. Like hounds at the sound of the wild halloo, the Afghans rushed from the room, knocking one another over in their eagerness to descend the staircase-ladder. The chief followed almost as quickly, remembering what his men had forgotten, that he had the key at his girdle, by

means of which alone they could pass through the gate to commence their midnight search, after descending the hill on whose summit the hill was built.

Sultána sprang down from the window. Walter heard her voice, as clasping her little hands she exclaimed, "Allah ! Sultána thanks Thee ! Thou hast sent her to save her Feringhee again !"



CHAPTER XV.

THE KNOTTED ROPE.

WE must return to Dermot Denis, clinging to his rope, and descending on his perilous way.

Dangerous it was, that he knew; but his bold and buoyant spirit was full of hope, as soon as by violent effort he had succeeded in squeezing his body through the window. He clambered down as rapidly as he could, for the doubt soon forced itself on his mind whether his arms, whose muscles were unaccustomed to that peculiar kind of effort, could support the weight of his body for any great length of time. The knots were in one way a help, affording small projections for the feet; but they made it impossible for the rope to slip rapidly through his hands, as cordage through those of a sailor. Denis intuitively counted them as he passed them; each knot was a step towards freedom, but their number was appalling. Denis had, he knew, made two hundred and fifteen knots; his arms ached before he had

passed twenty. He could dimly distinguish the outline of the top of the fort cutting the blue sky above him ; if he attempted to glance downwards, there was nothing but darkness beneath—he seemed to be descending into unfathomable space ! Down, down, down ! Eighty knots were passed ; the tension of the muscles now was agony, but Denis did not dare to let go. He could hardly even guess how far he was from the bottom ; he was alarmed to see how small a space he seemed to have placed between himself and the top. The climber feared that he could not have gone half the distance, and he was as one on the rack ! Desperately the bold Irishman held on his way ; ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, then he felt the knot which he now grasped not like the rest ; it was slipping—giving way—oh horror ! the next moment the unfortunate Denis was dashed to the bottom ! With characteristic carelessness he had not fully tested one knot,—*only one*,—and that carelessness cost him his life !

Low down amongst the brushwood, where no human foot ever had trodden, lay the mangled, broken corpse of the unfortunate Denis. *No time to pray*, he had said ere he started ; he had thrown away his last opportunity ; oh, had he but known that it was his last !

Denis had never deliberately rejected religion ; he had, as has been said, never disgraced himself by indulging in any gross vice. Selfishness and self-will were his bane, and he had never looked upon them as sins ; he had never thought that they imperilled his soul. Denis had never paused to consider, as he formed his life-rope of pleasures and plans, that he was in truth hanging over an abyss, into which a mere accident might precipitate him for ever !

O reader ! pause for a few moments and consider your own state in the sight of God. My little book may not be in the hands of the openly wicked and profane, but is it now in the hands of the self-willed and selfish ? Honestly ask a question of your conscience—"Is *my* eye watching the fiery cloudy pillar ? is the will of my God, and not my own, *habitually* directing my movements ? Do I do nothing without seeking direction from on high, and if that direction lead to what seems a desert, am I ready to follow it without hesitation ? " This is taking up the cross, this is following fully the Lord who *pleased not Himself*.

What would have been the fate of an Israelite who, when the heavenly pillar moved on, should have wilfully lingered in some tempting oasis, under the shade of the date trees ? He would have lost the *manna*, he would have lost the *water* which,

gushing from the smitten rock, supplied the wants of the host. He might for a-while have drunk from an earthly well, and enjoyed the shade and the fruit, but they would not have really satisfied, and must have failed him at last.

Do not turn lightly away from my warning, do not throw away the book, or quickly turn over its pages to find something more pleasant; I would plead with you heart to heart, my brother or sister, in this still hour in which I am writing in the dim twilight before sunrise. Look into your own heart and see what occupies the central place within it. Is it the *Saviour*, or *self*. In your common habits, your round of daily occupations, is your thought, "This pleases me," or "Would it please my holy Lord?" However innocent may be your amusements, however useful your occupations, however attractive you may be to those around you, if you form your own course according to your own will, you are trusting your safety to a rope which *must break*, your immortal soul is in peril. Down on your knees, ask for the eye of Faith to see the guiding Pillar; ask for the foot of obedience to follow wherever it lead; pray for the spirit of love to Christ to triumph over self-love; and doubt not that the light before you will shine forth more and more unto the fulness of joy.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS.

WE will now pass over seven long years, only lightly glancing at events which immediately followed that recorded in the preceding chapter.

The lifeless body of the unhappy Denis was found by the Afghans before morning. Great was the disappointment of Assad Khan and his followers to find their prisoner dead. Not only were their hopes of a large ransom lost, but they were sorely afraid that the heavy hand of the English Government would come down upon them and crush them, in revenge for the supposed murder of their captive.

“The yellow-haired was a great Amir, a man of mighty wealth, as a prince amongst the Feringhees!” exclaimed Assad Khan. “If it be known that he perished here, there will be a blood-feud between us and the lords of India. They will send an army over the border, and destroy the Eagle’s Nest, slay every man that they find, and hang me up with

shame and disgrace! He who offends the Feringhees rouses up a tiger who tears and devours. It must never be known that those two Kafirs crossed my threshold."

Walter was in the eyes of the Afghans poor and of little account. It was not supposed that any great search would be made, or large ransom offered for him. He must be kept a close prisoner, and the fact of his having entered the fort remain a profound secret; for, were it known that the one Feringhee was there, the fate of the other would be traced to Assad Khan, and fearful vengeance overtake the chief and all his tribe.

The disappearance of Dermot Denis, though not noticed for a few days, did indeed excite much attention in India, though newspapers at first only told of the adventurous traveller who had, unknown to Government, crossed the border, and for whose safety apprehensions were entertained. After a-while apprehensions increased — not by tales spread by the muleteers, for those unfortunate men had not been suffered to reach India alive, but by the absence of all reliable intelligence of the Irishman and his companion.

Then Government took up the matter. A large reward was offered, and investigations commenced.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF TWO ENGLISHMEN

appeared in capitals in every paper, and in mess-room, at dinner-table, in ball-room, the probable fate of the bold adventurers formed a common topic of conversation. But reward offered, and search made were alike unavailing; and other subjects of newer interest took the place of that which at first had been the topic on every tongue.

Denis's relations in Ireland were at first in great trouble about him. His sisters shed floods of tears, his brothers talked of going out themselves to India to prosecute the strictest search. But time wore away the edge of their sorrow. Again the girls danced at the county balls, and enjoyed their picnics and lawn-tennis. The elder of the brothers, in due time, succeeded to the family property; there were hunting and shooting in the fields, revelry and mirth in the mansion whose former master had not even a grave! Poor Dermot was almost forgotten; even his name was seldom mentioned—unless some stranger looking up at the full-length portrait, by an eminent artist, of a gentleman in hunting costume, should chance to inquire, "Who is that splendid-looking young man?" "Oh! poor Dermot, the best fellow in the world—lost in Afghanistan," would be the reply, carelessly given, and immediately, perhaps, followed by a request to pass round the bottle. It is only

for a while that the fall of even the largest stone into a lake leaves eddies to tell where it fell. The world's darling passes away, and the thoughtless world laughs on.

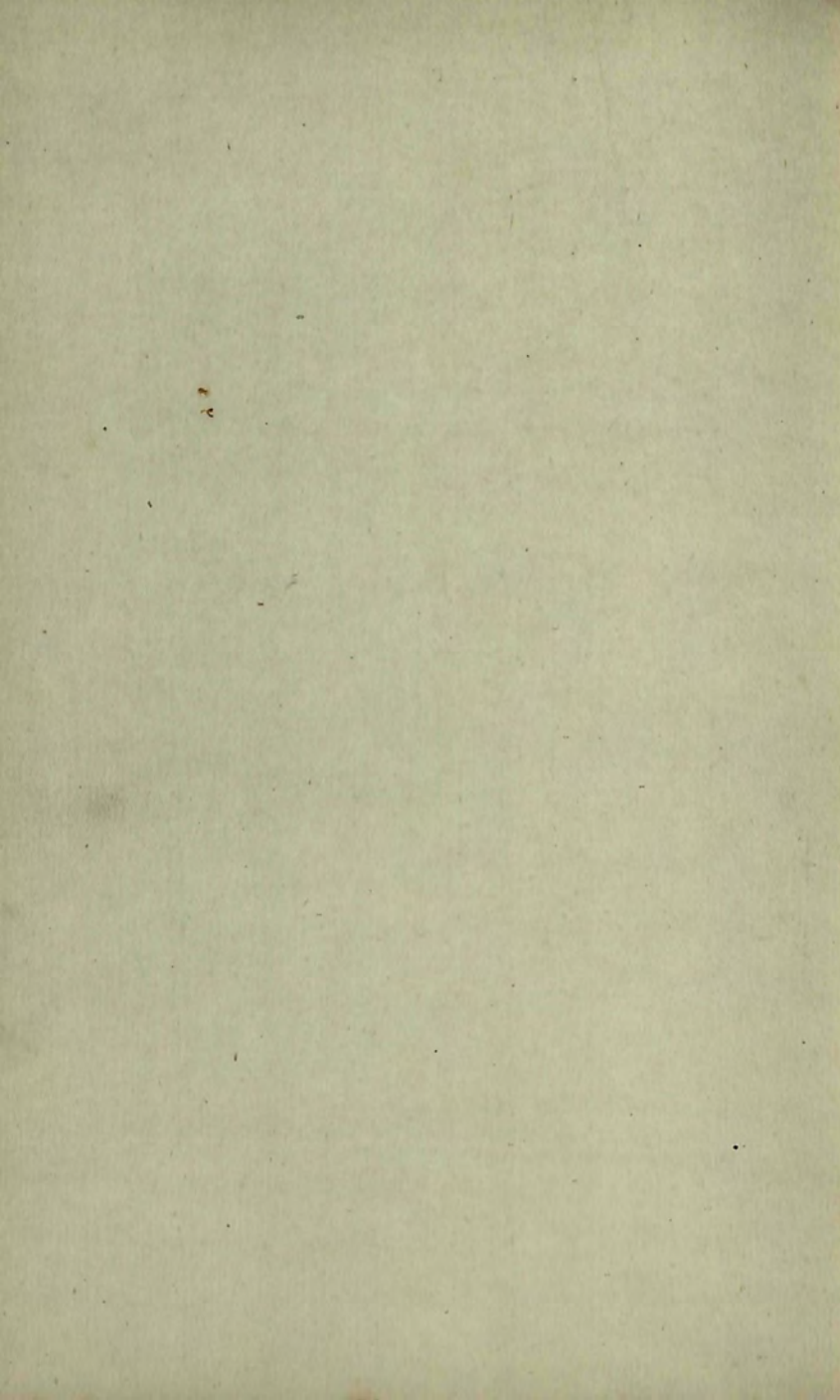
Seven years had passed since Denis on his steed, and Walter trudging as his squire on foot, had traversed the mountain road, when a British force, invading Afghanistan, encamped close by the thicket where Sultána had encountered the leopard. Hundreds of camels were crouching on the ground, relieved for a-while from their burdens; hundreds of mules were tethered by the tents. The blare of the bugle, the word of command, the confused noises of a camp resounded in the lately silent pass, and the sunbeams glinted back from bayonet and sword.

“To hero bound for battle strife,
Or bard of martial lay,
'Twere worth ten years of peaceful life
One glance at their array.”

A commissariat-officer, burdened with the care of providing for the host, was standing by one of the tents, pencil and note-book in hand, engaged in making some calculation regarding fodder and forage, when he was approached by a stranger of very striking and prepossessing appearance. The Afghan costume set off to advantage a tall and graceful figure, but the countenance and manner



“‘Ha! the companion of Dermot Denis the traveller!’ exclaimed the officer.
‘What a search was made for you both!’”—p. 147.



were unmistakeably those of an English gentleman. The officer looked up in surprise as he was courteously saluted by the stranger, whose face expressed the emotion naturally felt by one who, after an absence of many years, finds himself again in the midst of his countrymen.

"Whom have I the pleasure of seeing in Afghan disguise?" asked the British officer.

"You are hardly likely, sir, to know a name which its owner has half-forgotten. Seven years ago I was called Walter Gurney."

"Ha! the companion of Dermot Denis the traveller!" exclaimed the officer, as he cordially grasped his countryman's hand. "What a search was made for you both! What has become of Mr. Denis?"

"My unhappy friend died long ago," replied Walter gravely. "He was killed by a fall down a precipice, when trying to make his escape."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" said the officer. "This meeting is most interesting. I must introduce you to our Colonel; I will take you at once to his tent."

"Pardon me, sir, but I would rather be introduced to your Chaplain, if there be one with the forces."

"Here he comes," said the officer, as a missionary

acting as chaplain approached the spot, attracted by the sight of a European in Afghan costume. "Mr. Coldstream, let me introduce you to Mr. Gurney, a gentleman who was supposed to have been murdered many years ago by the savage Pathans."

The chaplain warmly shook hands with Walter, and congratulated him on his marvellous escape. "Where have you been? how have you been permitted to join us? how have you been treated?" were questions eagerly asked.

"I shall have time to reply as we walk together," said Walter Gurney, "if you, sir, will grant a great favour which I have specially come to ask. Will you spare us two or three hours of your time, and trust yourself to my guidance up a somewhat difficult mountain path? I will be answerable for your safety."

"For what reason do you wish me to go?" asked the Chaplain in some surprise.

Walter's sunburnt face flushed with pleasure as he replied, "A little flock, seven individuals, are anxiously expecting your coming to admit them, by baptism, into the fold of the Christian Church."

The Chaplain's exclamation of surprise was echoed by several Englishmen whom curiosity had drawn around.

"You don't mean Afghans!" cried the commissariat-officer.

"I do mean Afghans," replied Walter, smiling. "There are four women and three men in a fort on yonder height, quite ready to become members of a Christian community."

"I should expect bears and wolves to become Christians before Pathans," laughed a young ensign, who was not a Christian himself.

"Time is precious," said Walter, turning to the Chaplain and gently pressing his point; "I would not have you descend a difficult road in darkness. We can offer you refreshment above. I should be very grateful, Mr. Coldstream, if you could come with me at once."

"We'll come in a party!" cried the merry ensign; "one does not come across such an adventure as this every day."

"Excuse me, sir," said Walter, courteously but firmly; "a British uniform would create suspicion and alarm. Not many of our mountaineers have embraced the Christian faith, and most of them barely tolerate its profession. I promised that I would bring a clergyman, if I could find one—but bring him alone."

"This is really a foolhardy proceeding, Mr. Coldstream," expostulated an elder officer; "you

are not likely to be suffered to come back alive."

"I assure you, sir, that there is no danger, or none that would weigh a grain in the balance with a labourer for Christ," said Walter Gurney. "Two of those who are candidates for baptism in the fort are the chief and his wife."

"A miracle! a miracle!" exclaimed the ensign.

"I think that I can be answerable for Mr. Coldstream's returning within three hours," persisted Walter.

"And I hope that you will return with him," cried one of the officers present.

"Yes, I am anxious to avail myself of this opportunity of returning to India," replied Walter. "Not that I have any intention of deserting my Afghan friends; but I wish to prepare myself by study for ordination, that I may be qualified to act as their pastor."

"Oh, you'll think better than that!" cried the ensign, shrugging his shoulders and turning on his heel.

"Once out of the trap, you'll hardly walk back into it with your eyes open," said the commissariat-officer with a smile, as Walter, accompanied by the Chaplain, started for the fort.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RICH REWARD.

WALTER, with the eagerness of one who has succeeded in an object on which his heart has been set, was impatient to reach the Eagle's Nest ; but he had to slacken his pace to suit a companion not accustomed, like himself, to ascend mountains with almost the agility of the chamois. The way was often too narrow to admit of the two men walking abreast ; but, in other parts, its comparative breadth permitted conversation between them. Mr. Coldstream heard, with great interest, particulars of the fate of poor Dermot Denis.

"I never saw a man with a finer *physique*," he observed ; and then, glancing at the noble form and fine face of his guide, he mentally added "but one."

For the slender, delicate-looking youth had developed into a powerful man, with mustachio on lip, and beard on chin,—one so altered and improved in appearance that those who had known him seven

years before would scarcely have recognised him. The turban which Walter wore surmounted features regular and aristocratic, to which the singularly animated and intelligent hazel eyes gave character and expression.

"I am surprised that during all the years that you have passed in the mountains, you have never communicated the fact of your existence to friends in India," remarked the Chaplain.

"I could not, though most anxious to do so," replied Walter. "I was a kind of prisoner on *parole*. Had I not pledged my honour as an Englishman to do nothing of the kind, I should have been chained up, as a dog, by the chief."

"And how were you released from your promise?"

"I was released by the death of the chief, Assad Khan, which occurred not many weeks ago," replied Walter. "His relative and successor is a Christian, one whom I shall have the joy of presenting to you to-day."

"And have you indeed, in this most wild and weed-choked corner of the mission-field, been privileged to gather in seven sheaves?" asked the Chaplain.

"Not through my efforts were the seven brought in," replied Walter with a smile. "The first convert made the more successful missionary. She was the

means of winning for Christ her husband, her grandmother, and two female friends."

"What, a woman—and an Afghan!" exclaimed the Chaplain.

"A woman with the ardour of a Martha, and the faith of a Mary; an Afghan—with her naturally proud spirit softened and subdued by the love of Christ which constraineth."

"Most wonderful!" ejaculated the Chaplain.

"Dear sir," said Walter Gurney, "if we could have seen the painted savages who roamed in old times through our Britain, with their rude idols and barbarous rites, we might have thought that the Afghan suffers little by comparison with his brothers in the West. What is it that has made old England glorious and free but the Gospel? and what does Afghanistan need but the Gospel to make her the same?"

Walter spoke with the enthusiasm of one who has devoted seven of the best years of his life to the evangelisation of a despised race, and who sees of what that race is capable.

"You must have encountered immense difficulties," observed Mr. Coldstream, after a break in the conversation, caused by the extreme steepness of the rocky way, which at this part necessitated actual climbing.

"I could never have surmounted them in my own strength," said Walter. "When I look back, it is as I see that you are now doing, on the path which we have traversed,—wondering how I ever was enabled to gain the point which I have reached. God has led me step by step."

"And are your robbers actually transformed into anything like Christians?" inquired Mr. Coldstream.

"I own that some of the converts remind me of Lazarus, when called from the grave; they are living, but with their grave-clothes clinging around them. It is difficult to persuade men to whom theft has been a profession, and revenge a virtue, that these are sins to be repented of and forsaken. I have been under a great disadvantage; I have only had the New Testament with me; for whatever related to the older Scriptures I have had to trust my memory."

"This has been a serious disadvantage, indeed," said the missionary. "The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ; both Jew and Christian have had its teachings from childhood, and even where conversion has not followed, it has raised the moral tone. To the heathen and Moslem we preach Christ crucified, and we do well, for the very sum and substance of the Gospel is contained in these two blessed words. But this seed of Truth, when

received by those previously ignorant of the requirements of God's holy law, often springs up as I have seen an early crocus in England, when called forth by the beams of the sun, from ground on which snow still lingers. There is the bright blossom, and its very existence proves that it has a root ; but it is destitute of leaves or stalk. Thus its beauty is often marred, and its purity soiled by earth."

"I see your meaning," said Walter, "and my own small experience confirms it. There is the flower of love, the root of faith ; but the strong upright stem of conscientiousness appears to be wanting."

"It is on account of this," observed Mr. Coldstream, "that amongst converts from heathenism there is often conversion without any deep conviction of sin,—without the knowledge of the law we know not what sin is. In England, when the drunkard, the blasphemer, or the thief is brought to the light, his first feeling is usually horror at the blackness of his own sins. He abhors himself, and pours out his soul in penitent sorrow ; he regards himself as a brand plucked from the burning, and dreads the flames of sin in which he so nearly has perished. As far as my experience goes, this deep sense of guilt is rare in our converts. The heart is touched, but not the conscience. They who have

never listened to the thunders of Sinai have the love of Christ, but the fear of God is wanting. The missionary can no more leave such converts to themselves, than a mother can leave her babe. He rejoices at first in their simple faith, he thanks God for a new-born soul—till startled by some strange inconsistency which makes him, perhaps, doubt that faith, and fear that spiritual life itself is wanting. The pendulum of his feelings then may sway from the one extreme of excessive hope, into the opposite—and more dangerous one—of discouragement, if not despair.”

“And what should the missionary learn from this painful experience?” asked Walter.

“Much patience, much watchfulness, and much prayer. Patience with those who never in childhood had the clear outlines which divide right and wrong marked out before their eyes—those who have breathed, as it were, a polluted atmosphere from their earliest days, and are therefore scarcely sensible of its evil. Watchfulness, to guard the weak ones as far as possible from temptation, and, by careful teaching, try to supply the want of early training. With these, earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit, who alone can purify the human heart—that long desecrated and polluted temple.”

“How refreshing it is to talk over these diffi-

culties with one who has experienced, and can therefore enter into them fully!" cried Walter. "As regards all human help, I have been so utterly alone; I have had to teach when I myself required to learn. I feel more strongly than ever the necessity of leaving my Afghan children for a-while, to become by study, and intercourse with the experienced, a less unworthy shepherd of souls."

The companions had now come within sight of the fort, which was not visible from a distance, but which nestled, as it were, between steep crags, partly clothed with brushwood.

"Most picturesquely situated!" exclaimed Mr. Coldstream.

"Its name of Eagle's Nest suits it well," observed Walter. "You see a party of Afghans thronging round the gate to receive us."

"Yes; and they look as if they were eagles with sharp claws and beaks," said the Chaplain, surveying the wild and not altogether friendly-looking group through which he was to pass. For the first time Mr. Coldstream doubted his own prudence in coming amongst them.

"Mustapha Khan! why have you brought your gun? You know that it is against orders," said Walter sternly; and with a wave of his hand he sent the offender to the rear.

"I should doubt *that* eagle being turned into a dove," observed Mr. Coldstream, as he passed through the gate.

"Oh, Mustapha has given some trouble," said Walter.

"And will give more, I suspect," added the Chaplain.

But the sight that met his eyes in the courtyard put from the missionary's mind all thoughts but those of surprise and joy. Around the well stood the candidates for baptism; the men on one side, the women on the other; the latter arrayed in white. Sultána was there in her radiant beauty, the bud expanded to the beautiful rose, supporting her aged silver-haired grandmother, whose face expressed the peace which the spirit had found, the light which at even-time had shone upon her soul. Two shy-looking women stood rather in the back-ground, shrinking from the gaze of a stranger. Opposite was Ali Khan, with two companions. The young chief came forward to greet the Chaplain with a frank friendliness which made Mr. Coldstream reproach himself for having for a moment entertained doubts.

"Welcome to the Eagle's Nest," cried the chief; "welcome in the name of the Lord!"

"Will you question the candidates?" suggested

Walter. I will translate for you sentence by sentence."

Mr. Coldstream's questions were few, and entirely confined to the men—save, when turning towards Sultána, he asked simply, "Do you love the Lord Jesus? Do you look for salvation only through Him?" The beaming look on the lovely countenance of the chieftain's wife, as she gave her brief reply, was, as the Chaplain afterwards said, like the smile on an angel's face.

With varied expressions on their swarthy features, the yet unconverted Afghans looked on as the holy service of baptism was performed before them. Curiosity was perhaps the most prevalent feeling; but here and there a Moslem was seen scowling with undisguised displeasure. Once or twice the Chaplain's ear caught an angry murmur of "Kafir!" but there was no open opposition. The missionary thought of the lion-tamer in his cage of wild beasts, and wondered at the power by which a single unarmed man had been able to subdue or overawe such savage natures.

The simple rite was now over; Ali Khan and his companions were now welcomed as members of Christ's visible Church upon earth. The Chaplain's heart was warm within him, but his pleasure was small compared to that of Walter. In the scene of

former sufferings and perils, the young evangelist tasted what is perhaps the most exquisite draught of joy which is given to man on earth, for it is a foretaste of heaven itself. Who can tell the bliss expressed in the words,—“*Lo, I and the children whom Thou hast given me.*” That hour gave to Walter for all his past difficulties, trials, and dangers “an overpayment of delight.”

Mr. Coldstream, seated on a charpai overspread with a leopard's skin, partook of some refreshment prepared and brought by Sultána herself, Walter, Ali Khan, and the two Christian men sharing the meal. Mr. Coldstream admired the simple modest grace of the chieftain's wife, but remarked to Walter that she looked dejected.

“She feels—we all feel—the coming parting,” was Walter's reply; “needful it is, but painful. I have had considerable difficulty in obtaining the chief's consent to my departure.”

The hospitable meal was soon concluded. Mr. Coldstream could not linger long in the Eagle's Nest; the road being so difficult, he wished to retrace his steps before night.

“I must not, however, leave the fort,” said the clergyman, “without seeing the prison from which poor Dermot Denis tried to make his escape.”

Walter led the way up the ladder-staircase so

often mentioned, into what had been his former prison.

"This is still my room," he observed, as he entered the small apartment, clean, but very scantily furnished. "I have made but few alterations, except that of transferring the strong lock from the outside to the inside of the door. I have now the advantage of being able to shut out intruders, instead of being myself locked in."

Mr. Coldstream went up to the aperture through which poor Denis had passed to his doom, and shuddered as he looked down through it on the precipice below.

"What an act of daring—or rather of madness—to attempt such a descent!" he exclaimed. "The idea of it renders one dizzy!"

"My poor friend was one who never knew fear!" observed Walter, and he sighed as he remembered the heroic, noble-looking horseman in whose company he had first entered the country of the Afghans.

In silence the two Englishmen quitted the room and descended into the court-yard. They found it crowded, not only by the inmates of the fort, but by Afghans who dwelt in scattered hamlets, but still belonged to the clan, and paid allegiance to its chief.

The time for parting had arrived. Walter could not quit a place where he had done and suffered so much, nor the spiritual children whom he loved, without a sore pang of regret. First in a few soul-stirring words he exhorted the Afghans to maintain their fidelity to Ali Khan, and stand by him, through weal or woe. Walter then turned towards the brave chief, and, after the manner of the country, locked him in a hearty embrace.

"The Lord be with you, and bless you, brother! and be your strong rock and fortress!" he cried.

"And bring you back to us soon!" exclaimed the chief.

"Mirza, you also are one of us," said Walter to another of the newly baptised; and embracing him the young evangelist added, "let my parting words to you be the exhortation of our Lord to His disciples—*Watch and pray that ye fall not into temptation.*"

"You may trust me," said the Afghan; "my faith is as strong as my sword."

"Mir Ghazan, my friend," and again Walter's arms enfolded a burly-looking Afghan, "never forget the promise—*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.*"

Mir Ghazan responded to the embrace, but uttered no word in reply.

Then Walter turned to the aged woman, and reverentially raised the withered hand to his lips. "Bless me, mother," he said, gently; "*the hoary head is a crown of glory*. We shall meet, if not in this world, in a better." The old widow melted into tears.

Oriental propriety forbade even a parting pressure of the hand between the Englishman and the younger women. But Sultána followed her spiritual guide as far as the gate, there to bid him farewell. She did not weep, but her pale cheek and quivering lip betrayed her emotion on the departure of him to whom she owed life, and what she valued much more than life.

"The God who guided you here, and guarded you here, and made you a blessing to us all, be with you wherever you go!" she faltered. Sultána added in a softer tone, "You will not forget your Afghan children when far, far away?"

"Forget you, Sultána? never! night and day my prayers will rise for you all."

"And you will come back to the Eagle's Nest?" said Sultána, with a sad, wistful look in her blue eyes, as she raised them to Walter's face.

"God permitting, I will surely come back," said Walter. He could not trust his voice to say more, but turned and rapidly strode down the hill in

silence, which the sympathising Chaplain did not attempt to break. He noticed that Ali Khan and some of the Afghans were following at a little distance, to see the last of their English friend.

At the last point from which the Eagle's Nest was visible from the road, Walter Gurney paused, turned, and looked up. On the roof of the fort, in her white garments, stood Sultána; a cloud crimsoned with the sunset glow behind her head showed like a glory. It would hardly have seemed strange had white wings expanded behind her.

"A child of light!" murmured Walter Gurney. He stood still for a few moments as if fixed to the spot; not another word passed his lips, but his soul was pouring forth his silent thanksgiving. How marvellously had the fiery pillar, of which that cloud reminded him, led him through the dark night of affliction, suffering, and danger! His trials had turned into blessings; his troubles had worked together for lasting good. Walter Gurney had left memorials behind him on his pilgrim-path through the desert, living stones of priceless value that should, through all eternity, find a place in the heavenly city above.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NOONTIDE GLARE.

WHAT marvellous transformation scenes we behold in Nature! One day we look on the ocean, a seething mass of turbulent waters, leaden-tinted, save where the angry wind lashes it into foam; the next day a fair expanse of blue lies before us, scarcely dimpled with even a ripple, and sparkling in sunshine! Lingerling winter has made some landscape dreary and bare; scarce a flower lifts up its head; the trees stand like gaunt skeletons without apparent sign of life. A few hot genial days, a blowing of wind from the south, and the whole scene is changed! The primrose nestles under every hedge, "the larch hangs her tassels forth," the meadows are enamelled with daisies, and the fruit-trees are decked with the loveliest blossoms! Again, dark moonless night broods around; not even a star gleams through the sable canopy of cloud; there is an incessant dripping of rain. Anon sunrise bursts over the landscape,

the clouds are golden, the raindrops gems, all Nature laughs in brightness and beauty!

Such transformations occasionally occur in the life of man, especially after seasons of trouble bravely endured. Such a transformation was experienced by Walter after his return to India and civilised life. The interest which had been excited by his disappearance was intensified by his return. Afghanistan, on account of the war then commenced, being in every one's mind, a gentleman who had actually resided for seven years in a fort in that country was naturally an object of curiosity and attention. Walter found that every Englishman whom he met was his friend. Invitations followed invitations. Go where he might he found a home; he was welcomed into every circle. This was principally, but by no means entirely owing to young Gurney's romantic adventures. It was known that, though himself poor, he came of what the world calls a good family, and his popularity was also greatly due to the uncommon attractions with which Walter had been endowed by Nature. The ladies declared him to be the very beau-ideal of the hero of a romance.

There was some talk of a subscription being raised to place the young man at college, either in England or India, that he might complete his education, partially neglected in early life, and for seven

years entirely suspended. But Sir Cæsar Dashley, a civilian of high position in the service, and a distant relative of Dermot Denis, insisted on taking the whole burden of expense on himself.

"I will be responsible for all charges," said he. "It is clear that Gurney's imprisonment was the result of his devotion to my unfortunate and gallant cousin. I am glad to have the opportunity of serving so fine a fellow. Whilst I remain in India, Gurney shall never want a home."

After much prayerful consideration, Walter decided on pursuing his studies in India; not because it cost him nothing to give up his long-cherished hope of visiting England, but because he would not unnecessarily tax the generosity of a friend, and also that he could best, by remaining in Hindustan, master other Oriental tongues besides those of Urdu and Pushtoo. Walter entered a college in one of the capital cities of India, and at once set to work with vigour. His mind was as a soil which produces a hundredfold after lying fallow for several years. Study, a weariness to many, was to Walter Gurney a source of pleasure. He enjoyed it for its own sake, and not merely as a means to an end. The consciousness of success in every effort which he made, was exhilarating to the young man's spirit. Walter was like one who arrives so late in a hunting-

field that he fears that he will never overtake the riders whom he sees at a distance before him, but who finds that his first-rate steed not only overtakes, but soon leads on in advance of them all.

"We never before had a student here who combined such ardour and perseverance in study with such brilliant natural ability," observed a college professor to Walter's patron; "were he at Oxford or Cambridge we should some day hear of Gurney's coming out First Wrangler."

"And yet his fancy has been to qualify himself for the obscure work of a missionary; and in Afghanistan, too, of all places in the world!" exclaimed Sir Cæsar. "The idea is utterly absurd."

"Preposterous!" echoed the professor, "Gurney has too much common sense to throw such talents away."

The patron's generosity was not long required. When an account of Walter's adventures, concluding with the baptism in the Eagle's Nest, drawn up by Mr. Coldstream, appeared in the *Times*, it excited general interest. The letter was copied into almost every other paper. Of course it reached the breakfast-table of his uncle, Augustus Gurney. The successful banker, who had now retired from business on a handsome fortune, was proud of the now famous nephew, whom in obscurity he had

despised. Walter had not been two months in college before a black-edged letter arrived written in the same stiff hand as that whose contents, seven years before, had pleased him so little. This letter was comparatively kind, and contained, moreover, a cheque for three hundred pounds. Augustus was perhaps softened by trials which had come upon him during the years which had passed. He told his nephew of the successive deaths of two of his three sons by consumption. He let Walter know that if he chose to come to England he would have a welcome either in Eaton Square or at Claverdon Hall. Walter was pleased at the invitation, though he did not accept it, and wrote back a grateful letter of thanks.

The young man cashed his cheque, which appeared to him a mine of wealth. His first care—to him a delight—was to purchase numerous presents for Sultána, her husband, and many other friends in the Eagle's Nest. The difficulty was how to send them, for the city where Walter now resided was many hundreds of miles from the frontier, and it was by no means easy to make arrangements for the safe transmission of valuable goods through a country like Afghanistan, where utter lawlessness prevailed. Walter spared neither trouble nor expense, but still felt uncertainty as to whether

either his gifts or his letters would reach the Eagle's Nest.

Walter's next care was to repay his pecuniary debt to Sir Cæsar—no small relief to the young man's mind. He procured a smaller cheque, which he enclosed in an envelope, with a note to his benefactor of thankful acknowledgment of kindness unsought. Sir Cæsar was sincerely glad that young Gurney had an uncle with a good long purse; put the cheque into his pocket, and the note into the waste-paper basket.

Walter was now, indeed, basking in the sun of prosperity, and his present good fortune was all the more dazzling from contrast with its dark antecedents. The first years of Walter's life had been spent in utter obscurity; and straitened means had at last seemed likely to end in utter destitution. Then had come a struggle which had involved loss of liberty, and perpetual hazard of life. This struggle, more or less severe, had lasted through nearly seven long years. Walter had never felt sure that some fierce fit of anger,—nay, some mere caprice of Assad Khan—might not bring on himself a bastinado, or even loss of eyes or head. Young Gurney had pursued evangelising work under difficulties which most men would have deemed insuperable. No trophy had been won from Islam without

a perilous conflict. In addition to this harassing state of insecurity, it had been no small trial to Walter to be debarred from all intercourse with men of cultivated minds,—to live amongst the ignorant and savage, deprived of access to literature. Social intercourse was now a choice feast, and Walter partook of it with the relish of one who has been intellectually starved.

Young Gurney was not so utterly absorbed in his studies as to have no time for recreation, and he enjoyed intensely such pleasures as had on them no stigma of vice. Very delightful was it to go out in the cold weather, camping for a-while with Sir Cæsar, enjoying constant change of scene, and riding a spirited horse by the side of the Commissioner's daughter. Still more delightful, when camping season was over, to stand by the piano in the evening, and listen to, and join in, such classical music as enchanted his soul. The fair Flora never cared to sing solos when Walter's rich melodious voice was available for a duet. He watched her white jewelled fingers as they touched the instrument with faultless execution and exquisite taste, and almost felt, in the enthusiasm of his admiration, that he could look and listen for ever.

As Flora occupied an increasingly large place in Walter's thoughts, she must find some space in our

pages. She was the eldest daughter of Sir Cæsar, and in the absence of her mother, whom ill health and the charge of younger children detained in England, Flora reigned supreme in the handsome establishment of the Commissioner Sahib. She was possessed of considerable personal beauty, and the Bird of Paradise was the sobriquet by which she was often spoken of in the circle of her admirers. There could scarcely have been a greater contrast than that between the training of the Bird of Paradise and that of the little Afghan Eaglet in her wild mountain nest. Imagination could hardly have pictured Flora Dashley scrambling about rocks bare-foot, cooking her own dinner, or eating it with her fingers! Sir Cæsar, of rather pompous manner and ostentatious character, took pleasure in relating what fabulous sums he had spent on his daughter's education. She had had first-rate masters in music, drawing, and dancing, and to perfect her accomplishments had passed several years on the Continent. The result was such as perfectly to satisfy her father. In charms, personal and acquired, few could equal his Flora.

It was prognosticated as soon as the young lady joined Sir Cæsar in India, that before many months had passed she would certainly change her name. But years had passed, and she was Flora Dashley

still. The Bird of Paradise enjoyed her freedom. She could hardly be more pleasantly situated than in the house of her wealthy father, with no heavier trials than the sleepiness of *punkah-walas*,* or the spoiling of a dress by the moths. Besides unnumbered native servants to obey her commands, Flora had always some of her young countrymen eager to anticipate every wish, to break in a horse, or copy out music, or even undertake the heroic task of trying to tune her piano.

It was a rich enjoyment to Walter to converse with so refined and highly educated a young lady; it was to him a new, and most delightful phase of existence. Walter seldom cared to talk to others of his life in the Afghan mountains, but Flora drew him out with her questions, and it thrilled the young man with pleasure to see the interest shown by her in his strange adventures. Walter was by no means certain that his charming companion had yet given her heart to the Lord; but was not her ready listening to accounts of conversions amongst the Afghans a sign that a missionary spirit was stirring within her? Gurney guessed not how utter would have been Flora's indifference had the tales been told by some grey-headed pastor.

* Men employed in India to mitigate the heat by pulling a large fan.

Walter would fain have persuaded himself that the pains taken by Flora with the church-choir denoted pious inclinations; he cared not to think that her exquisite singing of hymns and sacred songs was due to her love of music, and not to her love of God. If her admirer could not hide from himself that the lady delighted in worldly amusements, Walter made every excuse for her education and present surroundings. Flora could enjoy reading a volume of Miss Havergal's beautiful poetry which he had placed in her hands; this Walter took as a token for good. He tried earnestly to draw the fair English maiden upwards, as he had been the means of drawing Sultána, and did not at first recognise the truth that, blinded by his admiration for Flora, he was making an excuse to his conscience for remaining in a position which imperilled his own spirituality.

But conscience, in Walter's breast, was too faithful a watchman to be easily silenced. If the Christian had found the pillar of fire his cheering light in the dark hours of tribulation, the pillar of cloud was now shading him from the more dangerous glare of prosperity's sun. It was not only that it kept his life pure in the midst of many temptations, but it made him search his own heart. Walter became painfully aware that, while advancing in

everything else, he was not advancing in spiritual life. Secular study sometimes encroached on time that would otherwise have been given to study of Scripture; and the image of Flora's dark eyes intruded often on his devotions. Walter was not contented with his own state, and that uneasiness was in itself a good sign.

Was Walter's promise to Sultána forgotten amidst the eager pursuit of knowledge and the fascinations of civilised life? No; morn and even the little band of Christians in the Eagle's Nest were remembered in earnest prayer. But it is natural that visible surroundings and the interests of daily life should engage more constant attention than what belongs to memory alone. During the fascinating two years which Walter passed at college, he received no communication of any kind from his friends in the fort. Walter wrote repeatedly to Ali Khan in a large printed hand, which he had taught Sultána to read, but it need hardly be said that there was no available post to the mountain home. Walter was in uncertainty as to whether his letters or presents ever arrived, as no one in the fort was able to write. This difficulty of communication, with doubt as to its success, was very discouraging to Walter. It seemed as if he were as little able to exchange tidings with his

Afghan friends as if they existed only in dream-land.

And, as time wore on, increasingly did Walter's engagement to return to his little flock in the mountains press on his heart like a chain. Every one with whom the young man entered on the subject, more or less condemned his plan as impracticable and wild. Yet Walter could not let himself be persuaded that a resolution made with earnest prayer should be put aside because man thought it unwise. The remembrance of the blessing which had followed his efforts in the Eagle's Nest could not be blotted out by college professors speaking of wasting talents, which would give him influence over thousands of educated minds, on a few bloodthirsty Afghans. Walter was not convinced when Sir Cæsar spoke indignantly of a promising, rising young man throwing himself utterly away; but, though unconvinced, Walter felt that inclination was constantly drawing him more and more away from a course pointed out by honour and duty, till he regarded almost with aversion the idea of returning to Afghanistan.

"I must end this miserable indecision," thought Walter, "and act as my conscience prompts."

Young Gurney wrote a letter to the committee of a Missionary Society in England, describing his own

position. He informed the committee that a bishop in India had consented to ordain him, after a two years' course of study, should he pass the required examination. The examination would be over before a reply could be received from England, and should the result be favourable, Walter offered himself to the Society for a post in Afghanistan. He described the small nucleus of a Christian Church existing in the Eagle's Nest; it might be a centre of missionary effort amongst a people yet unreached by the Gospel. Walter mentioned no personal qualifications but fluency in Pushtoo, and an earnest desire to win souls.

Walter despatched his letter to England, and then confessed to Miss Dashley what he had done. Flora looked surprised, and a little annoyed, but presently said with a smile, "The committee will not accept you; you will have to submit to remain with us, Walter." It was the first time that the young lady had called him by his Christian name; how exquisitely sweet it was to hear that name from her lips!

"Would you believe it, papa?" said Flora to her father, who entered the room at that moment; "Mr. Gurney is offering himself for a mission in Afghanistan."

"The thing is impracticable," said Sir Cæsar in

the tone of one who lays down the law. "My term of service being nearly completed, in two months we shall start for England, and Walter had better come with us. You will have your uncle's interest to give you a good start in life," he continued, addressing himself to young Gurney; "I advise your entering on a course at the bar. I should not wonder," he added more gaily, "if you ended your career on the woolsack."

As in the interim between sending his letter, and receiving its reply, Walter never entered again with Flora on a distasteful subject, the lady almost forgot the whole affair. She was much engaged in preparations for a fancy ball, which she could not persuade the student to attend even by the lure of seeing her in Afghan costume personate his favourite Sultána. But often—very often—even in the midst of hard study, did Walter think, almost without fear, of what the mail from England might bring. His reading up for examination gave him a fair and true excuse for seeing less of Miss Dashley; but very hard was it to keep almost entirely away, except on Sundays, especially as the dreaded time of parting was every day drawing near and more near.

With almost feverish impatience the secretary's reply was opened when it arrived about a week after

Walter had passed his examination with brilliant success. The letter, though couched in rather formal terms, was full of Christian courtesy. The committee, it said, had given due consideration to Mr. Gurney's offer to devote himself to founding a mission in the country of the Afghans. His high motives, his devotion and zeal, were highly appreciated. But after much thought the committee felt unable to send any agent into so dangerous a field, beyond the protection of the British flag. If Mr. Gurney would volunteer for work in India, his offer would be gladly entertained.

Walter gave a sigh—was it of disappointment, or of relief? He could scarcely have defined his own feelings. Almost intuitively he bent his steps towards the dwelling in which Flora resided, but paused at the entrance to listen to the delicious tones of her voice. He found the young lady at the piano. Flora had just finished her Italian song, and received her visitor with a smile.

"I thought that you were forgetting us," she said; "I have been wanting you for a practice."

Silently Walter Gurney placed the letter in Flora's hand, and watched her face to see what emotions it might call forth.

"The committee show some sense," the lady remarked, returning the letter. "I hope that

now you will give up for ever your mad idea of re-visiting the Eagle's Nest."

"But my promise?" murmured Walter Gurney.

"You are not bound by so foolish a promise. Suppose that I promised to spend a week in the house of a friend, and on my arrival found all the building in flames! Does honour compel me to stay and be burnt?"

"The case is not quite to the point," said Walter. "I have passed seven years in the Eagle's Nest, and my danger would not be greater, but much less than it was at the first. When I entered it, I had not amongst the Afghans a single friend, save one poor child; now I have seven friends, *Christian* friends, to help—or desert!"

"Oh, I cannot argue on such matters," said Flora, turning over the leaves of her music-book to find some particular duet. "But really, Walter—Mr. Gurney—you should turn your mind from such projects, as regards Afghanistan or any other place. The profession of a missionary is not quite that of —of—" She hesitated, not wishing to give offence. "I mean, that with prospects like yours, you might do a great deal better."

These few words gave Walter acute pain; they betrayed such utter want of sympathy in what regarded the spreading of the Gospel, in the woman

whose favour was to him as the very sunshine of life.

Flora ran her fingers lightly over the keys. "It is for the bass to begin," said she.

Walter mechanically sang through the duet; his thoughts were far, far away. When the practising was over, he somewhat hastily took his departure.

Long did young Gurney ponder over the conversation at night, in the solitude of his chamber, with his Bible open before him. Had he not, again and again, given himself, with all his powers, all his talents, to the service of a crucified Lord, and now was he not suffering the world gradually to enclose him in a snare, none the less strong because its meshes were formed of the softest silk? Whence came his increasing repugnance to fulfil his promise to Sultána? Was it not the impossibility of taking an English bride to the Afghan mountains? Walter dared scarcely think of Miss Dashley in connection with his own future; union with Sir Cæsar's daughter seemed almost as utterly beyond his hopes as if she had been a star; yet—yet—things more impossible had happened before. Oh, how delicious were day-dreams! but were they safe?—were they right?

Walter knelt down and prayed for guidance, that

Divine guidance which is never honestly sought in vain. He remained long on his knees. The young man arose with a pale cheek and a heavy heart. He opened his desk, and wrote a letter to his bishop, offering himself as a candidate for orders in the ordination shortly to take place, previous to entering on honorary missionary work. Walter enveloped the letter, and shut it up in his desk. He then retired to his couch, but not to sleep ; no slumber visited his eyes on that night.



CHAPTER XIX.

DECISION.

THE following dawn ushered in Sunday. Walter was accustomed on that day to breakfast with Sir Cæsar, and then accompany him and his daughter to church, a privilege which made him an object of envy to some young officers and civilians. Young Gurney did not on this day break the understood engagement. Those Sabbath mornings sometimes gave him an opportunity of speaking a few words on religious subjects to Flora, or reading sacred poetry, of which they both were fond. How soon these too happy mornings would become things of the past !

At the accustomed hour Walter mounted the broad flight of steps which led to the wide verandah, and pushing aside the green *chik*,* entered the drawing-room, in which were seated Sir Cæsar and his daughter. What a contrast that drawing-room presented to Walter's quarters in the Eagle's Nest !

* A kind of blind, admitting the free circulation of air.

The Indian mat which covered the floor was itself partly hidden under rich Cashmere rugs, tiger's skins, and the thick fur of the bear. The whiteness of the walls was relieved by painted arabesque patterns, with here and there a chromograph or well-selected print in a gilded frame. The tables were adorned with fine china, and delicate specimens of Agra's inlaid marble work. A profusion of flowers from a dozen vases filled the air with delicious perfume. In a most richly-carved ebony cabinet appeared a collection of elegantly-bound books; albums lay on one of the tables. It was the home of luxury; and everything on which the eye rested, from the grand piano to the small bird of exquisite plumage in its flower-wreathed cage, told of the presiding taste of a refined and cultivated woman. It was a fit perch for a Bird of Paradise.

Sir Cæsar, on the easiest of easy chairs, was enjoying the coolness imparted by the measured, monotonous swing of the *punkah*;* for, though it was but the end of March, the weather was already oppressively hot.

"Well, Walter," said Sir Cæsar, without rising for any more formal greeting, "we're to be off a good deal sooner than I had expected. I've had a

* An enormous kind of fan.

telegram to say that the Warings, who were going by next week's steamer, are detained by one of the children taking the measles, so that their cabins are vacant. It's not a chance to be lost, though it rather hurries our movements; but it's worth a push to get out of this heat. So Flora and I will be off in a week. Don't look so startled, my good friend. I mean you to come with us, and we'll take Italy in our way."

"Oh, yes; it will delight you to see the art-treasures of Venice, Rome, and Florence," cried Flora. "Certainly, you must come with us."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Captain Mills, an officer invited to breakfast.

A native servant in livery, bright with scarlet and gold, but with shoeless feet, announced that the meal was on the table; and Flora led the way into the room, in which was spread a luxurious repast served by half-a-dozen attendants.

Walter was unusually silent. The tidings of the sudden departure had struck like a knell in his heart. Sir Cæsar talked enough for both; he was full of his projected Italian tour.

Soon after the conclusion of the lengthened breakfast, the bells began to chime for Divine service, and in due course of time the party proceeded to the stately-looking church. Walter took

his accustomed place behind Flora in the choir. Was it for the last time? he thought, with a pang; or might he not avail himself of Sir Cæsar's offer, as he had now an uncle's home to visit in England? The young man was dazzled by the brightness of the prospect opening before him, yet felt—had there been no other reason against his going—that it was undesirable to travel as a pensioner on Sir Cæsar's bounty.

It was exceedingly difficult for Walter to keep his attention to the prayers; he tried to do so, but scarcely succeeded. But it was very different when the organ pealed forth the first hymn. This hymn was a great favourite with Flora, who poured forth in it her splendid voice without giving a thought to the meaning of the words. But the words were to Walter the very soul of the hymn, merely clothed with a musical body.

“Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me.”

Walter could not sing that verse at that moment; he felt that it would be a mockery to offer that prayer in which his rebellious heart did not join; it would be an act of hypocrisy, for he saw plainly the cross before him, and he shrank from taking it

up. To him, at that crisis in his life, the mountain fort in Afghanistan appeared much as the burning fiery furnace must have appeared to the three young Jews. Flora missed the familiar voice behind her, which had hitherto ever blended so harmoniously with her own.

After leaving the church, Walter declined Sir Cæsar's invitation to come home with him to tiffin. He had sometimes shared that meal, but had never joined in the Sunday drive, or the Sunday dinner-party. Walter felt that he must be alone; he could never exercise a calm judgment on such a matter as the important decision before him, under the fascination of Flora's presence.

"What is the matter with Gurney to-day?" said Sir Cæsar, when Walter had quitted the party. "He has been mum as a fish, did not sing, and looks thoroughly upset."

"He has studied too hard," observed Flora; but her smile betokened that some other cause for the young man's trouble had occurred to her mind.

"He feels this weather as I do," cried Sir Cæsar, passing his handkerchief over his heated brow.

"By-the-by," said Captain Mills, "did you see the paragraph in the *Weekly Times* which came by this mail?"

"I have not opened the paper yet," said Sir Cæsar.

"There's a paragraph about a certain Gilbert Gurney, only surviving son of Augustus Gurney, Esq. of Eaton Square and Claverdon Hall being killed by a fall in the hunting-field."

"Ha! that must be the son of Walter's uncle!" exclaimed Sir Cæsar; "then our friend Walter will be, I suppose, next heir to a handsome estate and at least ten thousand a-year."

"Lucky fellow!" ejaculated the captain; "lucky in *everything* I take it. But I don't suppose that the property is entailed, and Mr. Gurney of Claverdon Hall may not sympathise with his nephew's missionary peculiarities."

"Oh, we'll hear no more of that nonsense now," said Sir Cæsar; "the heir to ten thousand per annum will see matters in quite a new light."

There the conversation on the subject ended. Flora had not joined in it, but busied herself with newly arranging some flowers in a vase. But it was noticed by those who accompanied her in her afternoon ride that the young lady was in unusually high spirits at the prospect of her speedy departure for England.

Walter's spirits were as depressed as hers were elevated. He passed a second sleepless night, and

on the Monday morning was absent from the morning lecture at the college.

As he sat at his solitary breakfast, a letter was brought in which bore English post-marks. It had arrived by the same mail as that from the secretary of the mission, but a mistake in the address had for two days delayed its transmission. The student expected no letter from England, as his uncle, his only correspondent there, had written to him but twice in the course of nine years. But Walter recognised the handwriting of Augustus Gurney. His epistle, as usual, was brief :—

“Dear Walter,—You have probably seen in the papers that I have had the misfortune to lose my last remaining son, killed by a fall from his horse. You are now my nearest relative, and in declining years, with broken health, I should like to have one beside me. If you accept the position of a son, I propose receiving you as my heir. Come to England at once; I enclose a cheque for travelling expenses.”

Walter felt dizzy,—almost as if he had received a stroke of the sun. Will he sink very low in the reader’s estimation when it is owned that the latter gave him a wild thrill of delight? It was not that he coveted a fortune,—it was not merely the prospect of wealth that made his pulse beat so high. As a penniless adventurer he could hardly have aspired

to the hand of Flora Dashley ; but the heir of the wealthy Augustus Gurney might, without any presumption, ask her to be his bride. Walter sprang from his seat, and with rapid steps paced up and down the apartment. Satan tempted him—as he is so ready to tempt God's people—with arguments drawn from religion itself. Was not this letter, coming at so critical a time, an indication of the leading of Providence ? What a talent to be used for God would be wealth devoted to the noblest objects ! What visions of schools opened and almshouses built, a happy peasantry, a delightful home, rose before the mental vision of Walter ! He was almost persuaded for a few moments that his own will was the will of God. His was nearly being a case of spiritual sun-stroke indeed.

Walter's intoxicating day-dream was interrupted by the entrance of Will Green, a gay young college companion.

“Walter, you played truant from the lecture this morning. I'm glad that you kept me in countenance for once. No ” (as Walter motioned for him to take a chair), “I've really no time to sit down. I've brought you a present, a dirty old picture from the bazaar, put up for two annas, and hardly worth them. But I saw your good father's name and Santgunge written in the corner, so I thought that

it might be some family relic of yours that I had lighted on by chance. There it is," he added, throwing down his purchase on the table; "I can't stop now, I have an appointment," and the student went off as suddenly as he had entered.

A family relic, yes! In that stained, fly-spotted, insect-eaten piece of paper, Walter recognised the picture which had hung in his earliest home; it was the print of the Israelites crossing the desert, the story of which, Walter as a child, had first heard from the lips of his mother. As he gazed on it the young man seemed to hear again the voice of his venerated father uttering these words, which had been Walter's comfort in one of the most critical points of his life—"God may lead us into a desert, my boy, but it is a blessed way if His presence go with us."

A straw may turn a balance; a single sentence change the course of a life. Walter was again on his knees, in a wrestling agony of prayer. He arose comparatively calm, but pale as a corpse. Walter sat down, opened his desk, and took out the letter which he had written to the bishop, but which he had not yet had resolution to send. He then, with unsteady hand, wrote another. It was a grateful one to Sir Cæsar, thanking him for kindness which could never be either repaid or for-

gotten, but bidding him a long farewell. Walter could give no reason for not seeking a personal interview; he thought that a father might guess the cause. Young Gurney could not trust himself to say good-by to Flora. He but added a postscript, with a hand that trembled with agitation, in which he requested Sir Cæsar to remember him gratefully to his daughter.

It was almost as painful a task to write to his uncle; Walter was as one undergoing an operation, who would, while writhing under the knife, have all over as quickly as might be. The terrible work was over—the letters completed, enveloped, and sealed. Walter summoned the servant who waited in the verandah, gave him the three epistles, bade him take two to their respective destinations, and the third to the post. When he had done this, the unhappy young man seemed to have reached the utmost point of endurance. As the servant departed, Walter sank back on his chair, and covered his face with his hands.

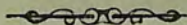
“Oh, pillar of cloud!—dark, terrible pillar!” he groaned; “thou art leading me into a waste and howling wilderness, indeed!”

In another hour Walter was being whirled along in a train, he cared not whither; he had taken his ticket almost at random for a place of which he

scarcely knew the name, and whose recommendation was that it was so retired that he was not likely to meet there with any one who knew him. There, in a dreary *dák-bungalow*,* young Gurney lay for some days in a fever; before he had thoroughly recovered, Sir Cæsar and his daughter had started for England.

Walter Gurney had narrowly escaped from one of the chief perils of his life—that of union with a vain and worldly woman, who would sooner have drawn him down to her own level than have risen up to his. He had all but crossed over the stile into the Bypath Meadow described by Bunyan, which leads to the territory of Giant Despair; that he had *not* done so was the result of faith's upward glance at the pillar of cloud and fire.

* A kind of inn, provided by Government for the convenience of travellers.



CHAPTER XX.

A POST OF PERIL.

IT is now time to return to the little band of Afghan converts left in the Eagle's Nest.

Whilst Walter had been basking in the dangerous glare of prosperity, a sharp storm of trial had been sweeping over his native friends. He had not been fully aware how all-important had been the support of an Englishman's influence, talent, and courage, to the newly-baptised chief, Ali Khan. It was now as if the principal pillar supporting an edifice had been taken away, or a vessel in a gale had been reft both of its main-mast and rudder. Yet as a building may still stand, though its strongest prop be removed, and a vessel float on the waves though main-mast and rudder be lost, so the chief in the Eagle's Nest for years held his dangerous post. This was chiefly owing to the following three causes.

Ali Khan was a brave and—until his baptism—a popular leader. Though he now discouraged

war and forbade plunder, no one could doubt the courage of a man who had slain a bear single-handed, and who had brought home more trophies of the chase than did any other hunter in the clan. Once finding three of his men, against his express orders, looting and beating a travelling merchant, Ali Khan had knocked down the chief offender, expelled him from the tribe, and made the two others undergo the bastinado. This vigorous execution of justice had for a time a very salutary effect on the minds of his turbulent followers. The Afghans saw that they had to deal with no child.

And Ali Khan, as the husband of Sultána, commanded a certain amount of respect. The young eaglet had from childhood been the darling of the clan, and now they were proud of her, Christian as she was, as being, in their eyes, the brightest, bravest, most beautiful woman in all their land. Sultána was no *pardah* prisoner in her zenana ; her light step, the glance of her eye, the tones of her voice were familiar to all in the fort. There were many who had received from her personal kindness not readily to be forgotten. In everything relating to the management of his troublesome people, Sultána was to her husband more than a right hand.

There was a third advantage possessed by the

chief. From the manner in which Walter Gurney had been received at the English camp, it was concluded by the Afghans that he must have great influence with the powerful invaders. The British troops were sweeping through Afghanistan, and tidings of their wonderful marches and signal victories reached the Eagle's Nest. Even when our warriors vacated the land, they left their prestige behind. The Afghans of the fort had an impression that Walter would return, and should he find his friend Ali Khan defeated or deposed, would draw on them English vengeance. The iron hand of power which had twice reached Kabul itself, would easily crush a small tribe so near the British dominions. Thus, for a considerable time, his own character, his wife's influence, and the fear of Walter's anger made discontented Moslems submit to the control of a Christian chief.

But there were no more conversions. It had been Walter Gurney's habit, during the latter part of his residence in the Eagle's Nest, to give daily expositions of Scripture, followed by singing and prayer; and his parables had been so attractive, his music so fine, his descriptions so vivid, that many unconverted Afghans had gathered around to hear him. Often the nod of assent, or the appreciative "wah! wah!" had expressed approval—if not of the

doctrine, yet of the illustration employed by the gifted preacher.

It was very different when Ali Khan, keeping his place on the page with his swarthy finger, read slowly, and with many mistakes, from the manuscript left for his use by Walter. His audience comprised none but the Christians, sometimes only his wife, for her venerable grandmother was slowly sinking into the grave. The seed sown by Walter had in most cases fallen on the beaten highway ; as soon as he had quitted the fort, the evil one carried it away.

Nor were there wanting illustrations of the seed falling on the stony ground, and springing up only to die. Mirza, one of the baptised seven, soon grew weary of isolation from his Moslem companions, and of bearing their taunts and ill-treatment. He very easily persuaded himself that though Christianity might be good for Feringhees, it would never suit the Afghan. Mohammed Sahib had been a bold and successful chief, who had permitted his followers to loot, had encouraged them to kill, and had promised on easy terms to his followers paradise and its houris. The oriental mind is not logical ; Walter's proofs of the truth of Christianity, if ever understood by Mirza, were forgotten almost as soon as heard. First the Afghan absented himself from prayers,

then received reproof with sullen anger ; finally he openly joined the party in the fort who scarcely attempted to conceal their dislike of their Christian chief, and their resolution to resist innovations. Mirza's wife, as a matter of course, followed the lead of her husband, and never, except from necessity, came near Sultána.

Then came death, still further to lessen the little band of Christians. Sultána's aged relative passed from earth. Her faith had been as that of a little child, and with the simple trust of a little child she obeyed the call of her Heavenly Father. Sultána, as she gazed on the placid face of the dead, felt that the venerable woman had indeed been taken from the evil to come. She was sheltered in the grave—or rather in the land of the blessed—from the trials and perils which every day were coming on thicker and faster.

The mind of Ali Khan was sorely troubled by the spreading spirit of disaffection ; his patience sometimes gave way under the daily provocations to which he was now exposed. His faith might have failed altogether, had it not been sustained by the firmer piety of his young wife.

"I am weary of my life !" exclaimed the chief one day, as he entered the upper apartment or zenana, where Sultána was plying her wheel.

Mirza is a false traitor to me as well as to his faith ; he is trying to undermine my power in my own fort. Half of the men of my tribe would not care were I to share the fate of the yellow-haired stranger. There were curses muttered to-day which I did not choose to seem to hear, as a Christian must not for a personal affront knock down a fellow with the butt end of a gun, or shoot him through the head. The fellows know that, and they take their advantage. Our Feringhee friend should never have come, or never have left us ! ”

“ He will come again,” said Sultána ; “ he promised to return to his Afghan children, and he never will break his word.”

“ He hath sent us no token, and years have gone by,” said the chief, gloomily, seating himself on the skin of a cheetah, spread on the bare floor. It was too true that neither Walter’s letters nor gifts had reached their destination ; the latter had been appropriated by their bearers, or the unscrupulous Afghans of the fort ; the former, which Sultána would have prized more highly, had been destroyed or flung away.

“ My men,” continued the chief, “ accustomed to a wild life of plunder, cannot or will not take to the means of earning their livelihood which the Feringhee friend proposed. They say that they

are not Persians to weave carpets, nor Kashmiris to embroider shawls. They are accustomed not to make but to take; not to exchange goods but to seize them."

"My lord has many troubles," said Sultána; "but there is One who can and will bear him through all. We will not yield, nor fear, nor complain."

"I feel the difficulty myself," said the chief, pursuing the train of his own thoughts. "In old times when we needed aught, we belted on scimitars and loaded our guns, and made a sudden foray. We came back fewer perhaps in numbers, but anyhow laden with spoil. Now—how am I to provide for your needs and my own? I have not a silver piece left."

"My lord will never shrink from poverty endured for Christ's sake," said Sultána.

"I do not shrink," said the chief; "I know that it is better to starve as a Christian than feast as a Moslem."

"My lord will not starve," said Sultána; "have we not heard that God feeds the ravens?" She had stopped her wheel in order to converse, and now drew the anklets over her slender bare feet, took the jewels from her ears, and the ornaments from her beautiful hair. Silently she placed them beside her husband.

"How could I rob you of your jewels!" he exclaimed, knowing how precious to the women of the East are such personal adornments.

"I need them not," said the daughter of a robber chief—how changed from what she had been in her childhood! "Let me not lay up treasures on earth; mine is the pearl of great price."

And a gift better than gems was to reward the young Afghan wife. In the course of that month a little bud of beauty bloomed beside the parent rose. Sultána clasped in her arms a lovely boy, and in grateful adoration she and her husband devoted him at once to the Lord.

Few earthly joys come without some drawbacks. It caused great dissatisfaction in the fort that the birth of the chief's first-born son was not celebrated by the gluttonous revels and superstitious orgies which had never before been omitted in the Eagle's Nest on such a joyful occasion. Sheep indeed had been killed, and a banquet provided; but vice and profanity had been excluded, and to the special indignation of the old women, not a single charm against the evil eye had been tied around the neck of the babe!

Ali Khan and Sultána had long been making a brave struggle to swim against the tide of dissatisfaction, but now it appeared likely to sweep

them away in its current. Mustapha was—and had been for months—plotting against his chief. The traitor tried, and succeeded but too well, in stirring up the smouldering embers of discontent into a flame. He contrived to have another key made for the large outer gate, so that it could be opened without the knowledge of Ali Khan, who, like his predecessor, always kept the key at night. Then Mustapha arranged a meeting of Afghans in a retired spot outside the fort, and to this meeting all the men except Mir Ghazan and Ali Khan himself were invited.

The gathering took place by moonlight,—by knots of twos and threes the mountaineers sought the appointed place. When Mustapha judged that the number was complete, springing on a piece of rock which raised him a little above his audience, with passionate gestures he addressed the listening throng of the fierce, long-haired Afghans.

“How long, O Pathans ! will you submit to the rule of a vile renegade, who has left his faith to become the disciple of a Feringhee Kafir, who has deceived, and now deserted him ! Are you, who soared like mountain eagles, ye who as eagles swooped down on your prey, to become as timorous doves ? Is the bear who went crashing through the woods in his freedom, defying and destroying whoever opposed him, to be led by a silken thread ?

Ye are not men, ye are women, if ye longer own Ali Khan as your chief, seeing that he has disgraced his name, deserted his faith, and cast dirt on the graves of our fathers!"

"Down with him! down with him! death to the infidel!" cried some of the fiercer of the Afghans, unsheathing their knives.


The disaffection was not universal; Ali Khan had still his admirers and Sultàna her friends even in that excited throng; but, as is usually the case, the louder voices and the more fiery spirits carried the day.

"Mustapha is our chief! Down with Ali Khan—hurl him from the rock!" shouted the renegade Mirza; and others took up the cry, "Mustapha! Mustapha! the true believer! Mustapha is the chief of our clan!"



CHAPTER XXI.

THE ATTACK.

“ WAKE, awake, Ali Khan! chief! if you would not be slain where you lie!” was the loud summons which startled the Afghan from his repose.

“It is the voice of Mir Ghazan!” exclaimed Ali, springing from his couch, and seizing his scimitar.

“If the chief linger, Mustapha and his rebels will be upon him! No time for delay!” cried Mir Ghazan, as Ali Khan drew back the heavy curtain which served in place of a door.

“What mean ye?” asked the Afghan chief. “Mustapha left the fort at noon and cannot return at night, for the key of the gate is with me,”

“I know not how that may be,” said Mir Ghazan, with impatience; “I found the gate open not an hour ago, for there had been a stirring in the courtyard, and I knew that some mischief was brewing. I went forth, following two figures that moved

before me ; they stopped just below the Vulture's Crag. I was present, unseen, at a meeting where, had they caught a glimpse of me, I had been silenced with a dagger. Mustapha is rousing the tribe against us Christians. I outstripped the rebels to give you warning, but even at this moment the bloodthirsty throng must be close at the gate. Hark ! hear you not their wild yells !”

Sultána, pale, but perfectly calm, with Rahim, her ten-days' old babe in her arms, now stood by the side of her husband. “We have no means of escape,” she said ; “if we go to the gate we but meet them. Let us hasten to the Feringhee's room” (it still commonly went by that name); “it has a strong door and a lock. We can at least hold out there for some hours—till the Lord, in His mercy, send us succour.”

There was no time for more words. Mir Ghazan's wife, roused by the noise, was at the foot of the dark stair which led up to the chief's apartments. The small band of Christians with hurried steps made their way into the court-yard, open to the silver moonlight, and then sped up the ladder staircase, Ali Khan himself being the last to mount it. Scarcely had he entered the Feringhee's room when the court-yard was full of Pathans, some shout-

ing the Moslems' *hulma*,* some, "Down with the renegade *Karanis*! Mustapha! Mustapha! he is our chief!"

The door was shut, the key turned in the lock. Thus a breathing space of time was secured to the fugitives, standing in semi-darkness within their narrow place of retreat.

"Let us pray," said Sultána, and every knee was bent in silent prayer.

There was a rush up the ladder, an angry knocking and thumping at the door; but the timber of which it was made was strong, and resisted the efforts of Ali Khan's assailants.

"Let alone!" cried a voice from without, loud enough to be heard above the clamour. "We have good allies within yon room. Unless the eagles bring the Kafirs food, and the hot winds water, hunger and thirst will soon force them to open the door!"

The words had their effect. The assault was for the time reduced to a blockade. No one was to be suffered to come out of the prison which the Christians had made their fortress. Pent up in their narrow quarters, exposed to hunger, thirst, and heat (for the month was May), the Kafirs should be driven at last to surrender and apostatise—or

* "There is but one God, and Mohammed is his prophet."

perish. In the meantime their enemies should feast; there should be a banquet to celebrate the elevation of Mustapha to the leadership of the tribe, and his fallen rival should hear the festal mirth.

Wild noisy revelry took place in the court-yard, and lasted till long after dawn. Notwithstanding the affected fervour of their religious zeal, some of the Afghans unscrupulously broke the law of their Prophet by copious libations of the strictly forbidden drink. *Bang*, a spirituous liquor, was freely circulated round, and its effects were shown in louder shouting, coarser jests, and more savage threats. It was as if demons were holding their revels below.

As day advanced the noises gradually ceased; no banquet can last for ever; most of the revellers were stretched in drunken slumber. But Mustapha had effectually provided against the escape of his victims by placing an armed guard of the more sober of his men to watch in turns in front of the ladder. The opening of the door above would be a signal for instant attack, or the fugitives would be shot down, one by one, as they emerged from their prison.

It was a time when the faith of the Christians in that upper room was tried in a very hot furnace. The courage of Fatima, Mir Ghazan's wife, was not

equal to the trial. The poor woman beat her breast, and tore her hair, and declared that Allah had forsaken them, and given them up to their foes.

"Allah never forsakes His children," said Sultána. "As soon, O Fatima, could I desert this babe who is dearer to me than my life's-blood. Dost thou not remember what our Feringhee friend told us of the pillar of cloud and fire which guided Beni-Israel? When the fierce enemy pursued with his horses and chariots, an enemy thirsting for blood, did not that pillar stand as a wall of defence between the weak and the strong, the faithful and their pursuers? The God of Israel is with us now, and will either save or strengthen us to endure!"

Not once did the faith or the courage of the young Afghan fail through all that terrible day. When Sultána had owned her Saviour at baptism she had counted the cost, she had known that she was entering on a path which might lead to martyrdom, following in the track of Him who had endured it in its most terrible form. Sultána now cheered and encouraged her companions, and hushed her little infant to rest with hymns of praise.

The hours passed on—how terribly slowly! The heat increased, every throat was parched with thirst. Fatima crouched in one corner, moaning and weep-

ing. Mir Ghazan found some repose in sleep. Ali Khan stood with arms folded, stern and still. He thought of what men in like desperate circumstances have done—how the husband has slain the wife of his bosom, and then rushed forth to die. But such deeds are not for Christians; their consciences are bound, their hands are tied—they must wait till Allah send death to release them. Sultána saw her husband's stern eyes turned towards the opening through which the wretched Denis had passed; she read the thought which flashed through Ali Khan's mind at that moment, before it found expression in words.

"On one side the precipice, on the other the foe; there the short agony—the fall—here lingering death by thirst and starvation. Such is the choice now left us, and yet—we trusted in God!"

"We trust yet and will trust!" cried Sultána, "did not the friend teach us the word, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!*"

"Mother of Rahim!"* said Ali Khan; "thy faith is stronger than mine. It is well that we have hope in heaven, on earth there is nought but despair."

"Nay, not despair, my lord," said the young

* The Oriental style of addressing a woman by the name of her child—not her own.

Eagle, her eye still bright though her wan cheek and parched lip told of physical suffering; "a wild fit of madness has seized the tribe. Mustapha has cast over them an evil spell; but the madness may pass away and the spell be broken. Let my lord be assured that some true hearts are with him still. Yar Mohammed will never forget who saved his life when the bear was clawing his face; nor Sadik Khan who nursed him, as a brother might, in his sickness. Hossein Ghazi—I could answer for his truth; he served my father and my father's father—he never will forsake their daughter. Let us but gain a little time till the first frenzy has spent its force, and then appeal to the honour and loyalty of our gallant Pathans. Wot not, my lord, how our friend would sway our fierce warriors by his powerful words, till eyes that never before were wet, eyes wont to look on bloodshed unmoved, were dim with strange tears, and proud spirits were bowed like trees when the wind sweeps past?"

"The Feringhee spake with power," said the chief; "his words were like the bullet from a gun aimed with skill, and sent with force—the bullet that strikes, and down falls the deer! *My* words are like the bullet thrown by an unskilled hand—it either falls short of the quarry, or if it reach it would not ruffle a hair. I never knew how to use



“ ‘I have him now! Dog of a renegade, die!’ exclaimed Mustapha, aiming the pistol at the head of Ali Khan.”—p. 211.

any argument but one—the strength of my own right hand, and of that my new faith deprives me. Ha! what is that sound! they are at us again!” he exclaimed.

Mustapha perhaps thought, like Sultána, that the wild rage of the men whom he had seduced from their allegiance to their brave chief, might be like some mountain torrent, though furious quickly spent. He would leave them small space to consider. About two hours before sunset, when the greater number of his followers had awoke from their drunken slumber, Mustapha again led an assault up the ladder. He now applied other means to burst open the door. A strong ruffian, by his orders, wielding a heavy hatchet, dealt blow after blow on the wood. Every thud was echoed by a faint shriek from Mir Ghazan’s terrified wife.

Ha! a portion of the wood gives way, a splinter flies into the room, a breach is made—not large, but wide enough to admit the muzzle of Mustapha’s pistol, and long enough to let him take aim.

“I have him now! Dog of a renegade, die!” exclaimed Mustapha, aiming the pistol at the head of Ali Khan, who was not two yards’ distant.

Sultána sprang forward, and interposed her own form between the deadly weapon and her husband.

"Fire!" she cried, "but your bullet will only reach the heart of a woman!"

"Give up Ali Khan! we thirst for no blood but his!" cried the savage Mustapha.

Ali Khan himself unlocked and flung open the door. "Here is your chief!" he exclaimed, manfully facing his foes.

Ali's sudden appearance somewhat startled Mustapha, but far more was he startled by a loud voice of command which suddenly rang through the court-yard behind him—

"A pistol levelled at your chief! can ye behold it, Pathans, and not strike down the villain! Seize him—seize the false traitor!"

The faithful Mir Ghazan dashed forward, and seized Mustapha by the throat. There was a brief desperate struggle between the two men, in which the pistol went off. Its contents were lodged in the brain of Mustapha.

"Shot by his own pistol—the judgment of God!" exclaimed Walter, for it was he who had given the order, as the bleeding corpse of Mustapha fell heavily from the height to the ground.

"The judgment of God!" repeated many voices with subdued awe, as if he who spake the words was a prophet. Walter stood amongst the wild mountaineers as one in command.

"What is all this?" he said to the chief, who, springing down the steps, was now warmly embracing his deliverer. "What has caused this mad tumult?"

"The tribe are weary of a chief who is a Christian," was Ali Khan's brief reply.

"The tribe!" repeated Walter. "Not half of them are present. And do men without sense of religion," he continued, looking sternly around, "men who break the laws of him whom they call their Prophet"—(he pointed indignantly to the traces of the drunken revel)—"do such pretend to zeal for their faith!" The Moslems cowered beneath the Englishman's glance and scathing words. "We will know what is indeed the will of the tribe. Mir Ghazan, Hossein Ghazi, summon every man to meet us here to-morrow at sunrise; let none be absent. And in the meantime, remove the corpse of that traitor."

"We'll throw it to the jackals," exclaimed Mir Ghazan.

"No!" cried Ali Khan, "give it burial. Christians avenge not themselves on their enemies, be they living or dead."

"Ah, Sultána, my brave child!" exclaimed Walter, all the sternness of his countenance softening to an expression of paternal tenderness as he

beheld the young wife and mother, with her infant in her arms, descending the blood-stained steps, radiant with unspeakable delight.

“I knew that our friend would return! I knew that the Lord would send help! Glory—glory to His name!” exclaimed Sultána, the tears which suffering could not bring, now welling from her beautiful eyes.

If anything dashed the joy which the missionary experienced at that moment, it was a feeling of self-reproach and shame that he had so hesitatingly, doubtfully, gloomily followed the pillar which had led him back to the Afghan mountains,—nay, that he had all but given up following its guidance. Had his return been delayed for but one day longer—one hour—nay, five minutes, he would have arrived too late.



CHAPTER XXII.

WHERE THE PILLAR RESTED.

THE fort, as has been mentioned, was by no means the dwelling-place of all the members of Ali Khan's tribe; though, their numbers being small, in times of danger all would seek refuge within its walls. There were rude hamlets scattered here and there in the mountains, as well as some huts clustered in a little valley below. From every tenement ere sunrise on the following day come the Pathans in answer to Walter's summons. At dawn the court-yard, with its recesses, was crowded; the mountaineers' manly forms, picturesque attire, and the various emotions expressed on their swarthy countenances, giving great interest and animation to the scene.

Ali Khan, with Walter on his right hand, stood on the narrow landing-place at the top of the ladder-staircase; this served as an elevated platform from which to address the people. Sultána, in the room behind, was an eager listener to all that passed.

"Ali Khan, brave chief, it is for you to speak to your tribe," said Walter.

"I never could speak in my life," said the Afghan bluntly. "You know my heart—you will be as my tongue."

'Nay, a few words from yourself will be needful.

Ali Khan was not the first gallant warrior who has shrunk from the effort of making a speech; however, after the pause of a few seconds, with manly frankness thus he spake:—

"Afghan brothers! we have been born amongst you, lived amongst you, and I had thought to stay amongst you to the end; but if you do not wish me for your chief, I tell you that I will only rule over free men, not over unwilling slaves. The world is wide—so is God's grace. We can seek for graves elsewhere. We will go, carrying with us our Christian faith, and leaving behind—our forgiveness."

Short was the speech; but it had its effect on the throng, who had listened with profound attention. Sultána felt proud of her husband's eloquence, and looked fondly into the face of her boy, discovering in his baby features a likeness to his brave father.

"Now it is your turn," said Ali Khan to Walter Gurney, who thus addressed the listening crowd:—

“Afghans—friends (may I not call you so, for albeit of another race I am willing to cast in my lot with you all)—you are assembled on an important occasion, to decide upon who is to be the chief who shall henceforth be at the head of your tribe. For more than two years you have been under the rule of Ali Khan; you know him well, he has been amongst you from childhood. Is there any man here who has sustained wrong at the hands of the chief; is there one who has been oppressed, or robbed, or tortured? If there be one who has just cause to complain of the Christian Ali Khan, let that man now lift up his hand.”

There was no movement in answer to the appeal.

“It then follows,” continued Walter, after a pause, “that you own that Christianity makes a man neither tyrannical nor unjust; it does not make him unfaithful to his engagements, nor neglectful of the cries of the poor. Brothers! ye have listened to the words of your chief, and what I say now I say as his spokesman. It is the desire of Ali Khan that I set two alternatives before you. If you, as Moslems, find that you cannot endure the leadership of a Christian, Ali Khan will make no struggle, shed no blood to maintain his right; he and his family will quit a land which rejects so brave and true a son. I have enough influence to procure

honourable employment in India for my brother and friend." (Here a dissentient murmur was heard from the crowd below, but no distinctly audible words.) "If, on the other hand, you wish to keep amongst you as leader the best and bravest man of your tribe, who asks but that toleration for his religion which he accords to that of others, Ali Khan is willing to forgive the past, to forget that his Pathans ever wavered in their loyalty to their chief. My own connection with the English will enable us to open up commerce, to procure for you advantages not possessed by tribes more remote from the frontier. The two countries, as you know, are now at peace; the scimitar of war is sheathed, the Afghan trader is welcomed if he descend into the plain." (There was again a murmur, but not this time of dissatisfaction.) "If I remain here, I tell you frankly, it will be as a missionary, a spiritual guide; but Christianity, unlike Islam, makes no converts by the sword. No man's freedom of conscience shall be violated; ye shall listen to my teaching or turn away as ye will. I come to you, O Afghans! as one who, having found a treasure, seeks to share it with others; as one who, having slaked his thirst at a fountain, would call his thirsty, weary brethren to come and drink also. And now, Afghans, I put to you the question, on your answer to which will depend

whether we remain amongst you, or quit these Afghanistan mountains—perhaps for ever. Are ye willing to retain and to obey Ali Khan as your chief?”

Out flashed many a bright scimitar, weapons were waved on high ; if there were any dissentient voices they were drowned in the almost universal shout of “Long live Ali Khan ! Prosperity to our brave chief ! We will stand by him to the death !”

While Ali Khan responded to the tumultuous acclamations of his followers, Walter turned and entered the room in which he had left Sultána.

“Oh, God-sent friend !” she exclaimed, clasping her hands, “you will remain with us—teach us—guide us—show us the way to heaven !”

“If the Lord will,” replied Walter Gurney, “I am ready to live and to die in the Eagle’s Nest.”

The world would deem the resolution that of a mad enthusiast, carried away by the excitement of the moment. What ! should one before whom was opening a brilliant career, with wealth, fame, friendship, love to beckon him on, give up all for what

that world would deem a mere philanthropical dream ! Could the brilliant genius find no better employment for his talents than teaching ignorant savages, who might at the last reward his labours by taking his life ? Were all the comforts, the luxuries of refined civilisation, to be exchanged for exile amongst the mountains, with hardships to be endured, and perhaps a martyr's obscure grave to be filled at the end ! " Strange folly ! " the world would exclaim, " to give up all that man holds precious, with nothing to weigh in the balance against it ! "

Nothing ! Oh, how different the calculations of angels ! In the balances of heaven what would the crown of a Caesar weigh against one immortal soul ? Did not the Son of God think it worth while to leave heaven itself to win it ? Let me quote the words of the missionary Duff—more powerful than any that I can pen : " This great and mighty Being did for our sakes consent to veil His glory and appear upon earth as a Man of Sorrows, whose visage was so marred,—more than any man's,—and His form more than the sons of men. Oh ! is not this love, self-sacrificing love, condescension without a parallel and without a name ! God manifest in the flesh ! God manifest for the redemption of a rebel race ! Oh ! is not this the wonder of the

world ; is not this the astonishment of a universe !” Referring to the angels, the missionary continues : “ Tell me, oh, tell me, if in their cloudless vision it would seem aught so marvellous, so passing strange, did they behold the greatest and mightiest of a guilty race, redeemed themselves at so vast a price, . . . issue forth in the footsteps of the Divine Redeemer into the waste and howling wilderness of sin, to seek and to save them that are lost ! ”

One more word to the reader ere we part. It may be not to you, O my brother or sister, that the call is given to leave your country to carry the message of salvation to the heathen ; for you the pillar of cloud and fire may rest over some Elam ; God may bid you watch over an aged parent, make a home happy, bring up children for Him. Your work may be in Scotch or English parish ; perhaps in the crowded city, perhaps in the peaceful village. But is your eye fixed on that pillar, the emblem of the will of your Heavenly King ? Is the calm peaceful resolution of your heart, “ *Wherever* Thou wilt, *however* Thou wilt, O my adorable Lord ! but guide me, and I will follow ! ” Then blessed is your path, whether in wilderness or green pastures, whether through roaring billows or beside the still waters ! Dispensing blessings to the poor around, teaching the ignorant, comforting the afflicted,

fighting against the power of Satan both within and without, you may be as truly serving the Lord, as truly pressing forward to the prize, as if planting the banner of the Cross on the height of some

EAGLE'S NEST.

FINIS

